



WAY OF CHOICES

BOOK 07

Mao Ni

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Way of Choices

(Ze Tian ji)

(择天记)

by

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Synopsis

To pick is to choose. This is a story about choices. Three thousand worlds full of gods and demons, with a daoist scroll in your hand, you are able to control the entire universe...

At the beginning of time, a mystical meteor came crashing down from outer space and scattered all over the world. A piece of it landed in the Eastern Continent. There were mysterious totems carved upon the meteor. Through viewing these totems, mankind comprehended the Dao and established the Orthodoxy.

Several thousand years later, the fourteen years old orphan Chen Changsheng left his master to cure his illness and change his fate. He brought a part of a marriage vow with him to the capital, thus beginning the journey of a rising hero...

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Book 4 – Soon Dawn Will Break in the East

Chapter 601 – Standing In The Light

Tang Thirty-Six opened the letter and looked it over. He realized that Chen Changsheng had heard that sentence of his from a while ago and was worried that he would stir up trouble, so he had written this explanation. In this letter, he said that his injuries were not at all serious, but they required long-term treatment from Xu Yourong's Sacred Light technique. Moreover, Xu Yourong was still a young woman, so her somewhat overdoing things was to be expected.

These explanations were all reasonable but were wholly incapable of convincing Tang Thirty-Six. However, on the journey back to the capital, he had no plans to stir any trouble and so was prepared to have Ye Xiaolian bring back his reply to Chen Changsheng. To his surprise, he found that this female disciple of South Stream Temple had a rather unkind expression, those eyes fixed upon him seeming to want nothing more than to eat him alive.

Two years ago on the Divine Avenue of the Li Palace, he had once unleashed a torrent of abuse upon this disciple of Holy Maiden Peak, making her cry endless bitter tears. To him, that had only been a very trivial matter, almost forgotten by him. Only when Chen Changsheng had brought it up again did he recall this incident and match her up with that little girl from two years ago.

"Please don't give me that look. Back then, you were the one to stir up trouble, so my actions were just reasonable self-defense."

Tang Thirty-Six said firmly to Ye Xiaolian, "The one who

provokes is the lowly one. I hope you can agree with this principle."

Putting aside the fact that there existed no such principle as this in the world, when speaking about the word 'lowly', it was truly very difficult to find a person that surpassed him in this aspect.

Ye Xiaolian was keenly aware of this point and naturally would not respond. She just continued staring.

Tang Thirty-Six lowered his head and began to write his reply, commenting, "Recently, it seems that all of you South Stream Temple disciples seem very irritated."

Ye Xiaolian thought, anyone who saw the Holy Maiden so diligently care for Chen Changsheng in the past few days would not be in any sort of good mood.

Tang Thirty-Six hastily composed a reply and placed the letter in her hands. Seeing her expression, he guessed what she was thinking and said, "He's injured after all, you shouldn't be too petty."

Ye Xiaolian could no longer hold back, replying, "If he's injured we can also take care of him, but why does the temple master insist on personally doing it?"

Tang Thirty-Six thought, this is also something that I and Zhexiu can't understand. However, he wouldn't say this aloud to her, so he

replied, "They have an engagement, so it's naturally more convenient."

Ye Xiaolian seriously corrected, "They once had an engagement. The engagement has already been annulled, and by Chen Changsheng himself."

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"Anyone who saw this would think that they were a loving couple. They would find it impossible to imagine that the engagement between the two of them had long been annulled."

Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang stood in the grass by the road, watching the imperial carriage in front of them.

Linghai Zhiwang glanced at Mao Qiuyu, wanting to ask whether his sudden statement had any deeper meaning behind it.

Mao Qiuyu looked back at him and calmly replied, "The current situation is extremely clear. The Holy Maiden will probably be married off to Chen Changsheng. Has your side made the preparations?"

Linghai Zhiwang said nothing, his expression somewhat gloomy. At this level, there was naturally no one who dared to demand anything from Xu Yourong in terms of the mundane standards of

obedience expected from a wife to her husband. However, if Xu Yourong truly did marry Chen Changsheng, there was also no reason to continue treating him as an enemy. As he thought about the change in Xu Yourong's attitude that had occurred in Mount Han, he felt a little cold.

For many years, Holy Maiden Peak had been the Divine Empress's ally in the south. When the Divine Empress pushed the confluence of the north and south, she had received a great deal of assistance from the previous Holy Maiden. Taken together with the well-known fact that the Divine Empress regarded Xu Yourong as her own daughter, anyone would think that this situation would not change for a very long time.

But if the current Holy Maiden was truly married off to Chen Changsheng? Would Holy Maiden Peak continue to support the Divine Empress?

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Just as Xu Yourong had said, the ten thousand li journey from Mount Han to the capital was very peaceful and no problems were encountered.

Under the company of the multitudinous stars in the night sky, a convoy of several dozen carriages entered the capital. That red flower which had been swaying about in the plains for a very long time noiselessly vanished, while that man in the bamboo hat even

further away had gone off to some high mountain to once more appreciate the stars.

After entering the capital, the convoy did not disperse. It did not go to the Orthodox Academy, not to the Imperial Palace, not to the Divine General of the East's estate, but instead, the entire convoy went to the Li Palace.

Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang stood under the pines and cypresses lining the Divine Avenue. They did not gaze at each other, but simultaneously gazed towards the end of the Divine Avenue.

Other than these two, people like Tang Thirty-Six and the others did not even have a chance to step upon the Divine Avenue.

Xu Yourong pushed the wheelchair-bound Chen Changsheng up the Divine Avenue, all the way towards that serene palace hall in the deepest depths of the Li Palace.

The Pope stood at the stone steps in front of the hall to welcome them.

This was respect towards the Orthodoxy's southern faction aligned with Holy Maiden Peak and also because he was deeply concerned.

Chen Changsheng sat upon the wheelchair, a blanket of gray wool draped over his shoulders. He looked very much like an

invalid.

In reality, his complexion was very good and seemingly brimming with vigor. He looked very healthy, totally unlike an invalid.

Seeing the Pope standing in front of the palace hall, Xu Yourong did not find it strange. Without taking her two hands off the wheelchair, she bowed.

Chen Changsheng said to her, "I have some things to say to Martial Uncle. Go to someplace else and wait for me."

After a moment of silence, Xu Yourong ultimately did not reject his decision and walked off towards a nearby hall.

The priests standing guard outside the palace knew her identity and naturally did not dare to obstruct her. Their eyes understandably showing some shock, they bowed and scattered to inform the others.

Xu Yourong paid no attention to their gazes and expressionlessly walked into the hall.

This palace hall was exceptionally tall and lofty, grand to the extreme. Carved upon its stone walls were countless stories from the classics of the Daoist Canon, as well as many sculptures of past worthies.

This was the great hall of the Orthodoxy: the Great Hall of Light.

The Orthodoxy was separated into a northern and southern faction. The northern faction paid respects to the Pope while the southern faction treated the Holy Maiden as leader. In these countless years, the open struggles and secret battles between the two factions had produced countless stories. Later on, the situation gradually settled down and several Holy Maidens of the south had even paid visits to the capital. As both factions still had the same origin, it was only right that the Holy Maidens dwell in the Li Palace, but since there were differences between the north and south, none of them had ever stepped into the Great Hall of Light.

When Xu Yourong was small, she often played around in the Imperial Palace and the Li Palace, and she had even sneaked into the Great Hall of Light to play hide and seek.

But she was now Holy Maiden of the south, and stepping into the Great Hall of Light carried a completely different meaning.

When Daoist Siyuan heard the news, he quickly hurried over with several cardinals and a reverential attitude, wishing to show her around.

"You don't have to worry about me, I just wish to quietly compose myself here," Xu Yourong said.

Daoist Siyuan and those cardinals were all speechless, thinking, if my lady only wishes for silence, what need is there to do it here?

Could my lady not realize the shock that would be brought about if the world were to know that the Holy Maiden of the south has finally stepped into the Great Hall of Light?

Xu Yourong said no more. She only held her hands behind her and quietly stood below the altar, examining those thirty-some-zhang murals on the wall, pondering something.

Helpless, Daoist Siyuan could only bring the cardinals out of the Great Hall of Light and wait outside.

Even though it was late in the night, the Great Hall of Light was still brightly lit, with countless gentle rays of light exuding from the pillars, wall, and sculptures.

Xu Yourong stood in the light. Perhaps because those rays of light were too bright, her face was rather pale.

Chapter 602 – Nothing But Darkness Before The Eyes

In the ten thousand li journey south, Xu Yourong would use the Sacred Light technique on Chen Changsheng at set intervals, cutting off his Qi from the rest of the world.

When passing through Beishan County, she had also transferred blood to Chen Changsheng two times in succession.

In terms of mental energy, true essence, or her most precious Heavenly Phoenix true blood and Sacred Light, she had already exhausted too much.

Moreover, in Mount Han, for the sake of saving Chen Changsheng, she had firmly received that sword of the Heavenly Dao and suffered significant injuries.

But she still could not rest.

At this moment, she was quietly standing in the Great Hall of Light because she could recover faster here, especially with the complement of the Sacred Light.

And this place was closest to that place, separated only by a wall. If something were to happen, she could quickly blast that wall apart and hurry over.

At this time, the Pope and Chen Changsheng were speaking over there.

With the many stars high in the sky, the entire capital was awash in a watery silver light. The depths of the Li Palace had overhanging eaves all over the place, and so the darkness was more preserved here.

Chen Changsheng took off the blanket, but he did not stand up from the wheelchair.

He lowered his head and very seriously folded the blanket into a small square, then raised his head and asked the Pope, "Martial Uncle, just who am I?"

He had asked this question once to the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets had given him an extremely confident answer, but it was not precise enough.

The Pope quietly stared at him for a very long time. Just when Chen Changsheng felt that it would be like the past few times and he would still be unable to obtain an exact answer, the Pope slowly opened his mouth and spoke, "At the very beginning when I received a letter from your master, I believed that you were my martial nephew, entering the capital to seek a cure for your illness. The cure was to cultivate, and what you cultivated was according to what your heart desired, so I did not appear."

Upon hearing this, Chen Changsheng recalled those incidents that took place two and a half years ago when he first entered the capital. He vaguely understood that before he entered the Orthodox Academy, his master's letter had already reached the capital.

The Pope walked behind him and began pushing the wheelchair into the hall. Ramps carved with drifting clouds sat to both sides of the stone steps. As the wheels of the wheelchair rolled across the surface of the ramp, they made an extremely rhythmic clacking, just like the voice of the Pope, calm but with a sense of sorrow. "Only later on, when Mei Lisha came to find me, did I learn that he had also received a letter."

The hall in the night was very peaceful. The clear waters of the pool reflected the starlight, speckling the walls and pillars with clear light. That lush Green Leaf gently swayed in its pot, almost bewitchingly beautiful.

"To speak the truth, even now, I also do not understand what exactly your master wishes to do."

The Pope released the wheelchair, walked to the pool and lifted up the wooden ladle. Taking up half a ladle of water, he began to water the Green Leaf.

Starlight spilled in from the colored glass in the roof of the hall, falling upon the Pope's hempen robe as if inscribing countless incomprehensible runes upon it.

Chen Changsheng looked at his slightly bent body. After a moment of silence, he asked, "If Martial Uncle does not know what he plans to do, why help him?"

"I am keenly aware that you are the person that wishes to know the most why your master sent you to the capital...if you really are Crown Prince Zhaoming."

The clear water falling from the wooden ladle gurgled, not obscuring the Pope's voice, but providing a background.

"What your master wishes to do in this life is very simple: to invite Tianhai down from the imperial throne, or to drive her off it, and thus return the position of emperor to the Chen clan. I think...his allowing you to enter the capital most certainly has something to do with this. At present, I already have a faint inkling of what your master wants to attempt, but I have no means of being sure."

"In that bloody incident of the Orthodox Academy all those years ago, everyone says that Martial Uncle personally killed Master. It now seems that it naturally can't be true."

The Pope's voice was as pleasant and gentle as flowing water. "The legitimate line of the Orthodoxy only consists of me and your master, so how could I bear killing him? Moreover, at that time, although he had been heavily wounded by Tianhai in the Imperial Palace, I still would have found it no easy feat to kill him... I originally thought that this matter would forever remain concealed, but I did not imagine that you would come to the capital."

Chen Changsheng said, "Because I came to the capital, because of Master's letter, because Martial Uncle took care of me, the Divine Empress very easily found out that my master was still alive."

"Everyone says that the Elder of Heavenly Secrets can clearly understand the Heavenly Dao, that Black Robe's schemes are without equal, but in truth, your master is the true schemer. Without discussing what his true goal is in sending you to the capital, just intentionally revealing the fact that he is still alive to Tianhai has caused a tear to open between me and her, and this tear grows ever larger."

"Since it is impossible to repair this tear, the suspicions Martial Uncle and the Divine Empress have against each other will eventually become hostility."

"Yes, once there is hostility, once one discovers the other side's hostility, then when they come to stand on opposite sides, they will be enemies."

"Isn't this saying that Master is using the compassion Martial Uncle showed for him back then to force Martial Uncle into standing at his side?"

Chen Changsheng gazed at the Pope's back and realized that it seemed more and more stooped, more and more like that of a tired old man. As a result, his voice subconsciously became more downcast, just like his current mood.

But the Pope's voice was still its customary calm. "As I said before, your master is the true schemer. In his view, anything can be sacrificed in order to reach his goal."

Chen Changsheng felt even more depressed at these words. "Why does it have to be this way?" he asked.

The Pope released the wooden ladle and took up the dry towel by the pot to wipe his hands. "Back then, I and your master were at odds because we had different views of the world. Today, your master has used all his methods to force me to stand by his side, but I can calmly accept this because time has changed many things and my and Tianhai's views of the world are already different."

Chen Changsheng recalled the conversation he had in this dark palace after returning from the Mausoleum of Books.

"I also now believe that Tianhai should abdicate."

Although the volume of the Pope's voice in this dark palace hall was not great, a clap of thunder seemed to ring out from high up in the night sky.

There was no sound in the hall other than the water trickling down from the wooden ladle suspended in the air.

After quite some time had passed, Chen Changsheng once more opened his mouth and asked, "Then what about me? What sort of role am I playing? Just why did Martial Uncle and Mei Lisha watch

over me for these past two years?"

"I can only speculate at your master's motives while Mei Lisha probably knew a little more, but you must have faith that this elder that has already returned to the sea of stars would not have any thoughts of harming you. His thoughts and your master's are not necessarily one and the same. He firmly believed that you would be greatly harmed, but that you would also obtain many benefits."

"Benefits?"

"Mei Lisha believed that only through this method could your illness be cured."

"Can my illness be cured?" Chen Changsheng's voice trembled as he spoke.

The Pope walked in front of the wheelchair, the eyes gazing at him as serene as the water. "Even fate can be changed, so why not an illness?"

Chen Changsheng quickly calmed back down. He looked back at the Pope and seriously asked, "Martial Uncle has long known that I am ill."

The Pope replied, "Correct."

Chen Changsheng turned even more serious, asking, "Then does

Martial Uncle also know of this matter?"

This was the deepest and most secluded part of the Li Palace, so it was gloomy, only a little starlight spilling in from the colored glass at the roof of the hall.

He sat on a wheelchair, the woolen blanket folded into a square on his thighs, his clothes thin.

The stars moved with time, and at some point, the brightest star in the night sky, the Dragon Soaring Star, appeared above the dark palace hall, its starlight passing through the colored glass and descending upon his body.

Starlight was even softer and gentler than snowflakes, and so it descended without a noise. Yet for some reason, there was a tiny whoosh like something was being set alight.

Chen Changsheng was borrowing the starlight to ignite that scant remaining star radiance in his body.

His meridians were all ruptured, and so the true essence, whether in his Ethereal Palace or the snowy plain outside it, had nowhere to be released and crashed about inside his body.

His body very quickly became hotter. His face and neck, as well as his two hands, all became somewhat red.

Examining with the eyes would reveal a dull pink color, but

within his body, it was a blood red color, because it was a sign that he was bleeding within his body.

As his body's temperature rose, his skin turned redder, turning from an illusion of health to a bewitchingly strange monster. At the same time, an extremely faint Qi began to issue from his countless pores and face. Carried along by the night wind, it was brought to the Pope.

The Pope's expression instantly changed, the endless sea of stars within his eyes instantly transforming into a surging river of stars.

In those two eyes, no kindness remained, only a powerful apathy and a cruel will.

Chapter 603 – You Are The Most Tempting Fruit

"Do you know what you are doing?"

The voice seeping through the Pope's lips was no longer like water, but a bone-chilling cold.

Chen Changsheng looked into his eyes and solemnly declared, "I'm well aware of what I am doing."

He seemed very calm, but he was actually very nervous, the hands gripping the arms of the wheelchair slightly shaking, even the blood on his face dulling due to his emotions.

He did not use the Blazing Sword technique. He had placed his true essence under a certain level of control to ensure that the speed at which his true blood flowed out of his body was not too quick.

But for the Pope, one of the supreme experts of the world, it would naturally be easy to catch scent of his blood's odor at such a close distance.

The sea of stars within the Pope's eyes had already transformed into a raging river.

Chen Changsheng was taking a risk, a risk that put his life in

danger, or even a danger that exceeded this sort of level.

He had done so on purpose.

As he was incapable of knowing exactly what his master's intentions were, his martial uncle the Pope was his most important elder in this world, yet he was also the person that he could trust the least.

The Pope had said that Archbishop Mei Lisha had no evil intentions against him, so what about the Pope himself?

He had to clearly know what sort of stance the Pope had towards him, whether he held goodwill or malice towards his existence.

If the Pope held malice towards his existence, then he would obtain from his body the greatest of benefits and would just eat him.

This sort of temptation and desire was far more important than the imperial throne, far more important than authority.

Just what would the Pope do?

He quietly gazed at the rampaging river of stars in the Pope's eyes, his tension gradually fading, leaving behind only calm, true calm.

The Pope stared at him, the raging river of stars growing even more frightening, as if it could swallow the entire world at any moment.

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Xu Yourong stood in the light, quietly examining the murals on the walls. Her head was raised, but she was not looking up.

Upon this mural, the images of twelve sages were drawn. These twelve sages were not all Saints, but they all played critical roles in the Orthodoxy's history, and so their status was even higher than the Saints.

It was said that this several-dozen-zhang-tall stone wall and the murals drawn upon it were all made with materials mixed with fragments of Heavenstones. As long as there was the tiniest external source of light, they would release boundless light.

Consequently, whether day or night, this place would also be so illuminated and dignified.

Suddenly, the rays of light within the hall grew even brighter, even somewhat dazzling.

Xu Yourong slightly squinted her eyes, her beautiful eyes like willow leaves and also like the edges of a sword.

She had sensed the raging energies within the light and opened her arms wide.

With two claps, the Tong Bow came to be gripped in her left hand while the temple sword was gripped in her right.

Whoosh!

Two pure white wings unfurled behind and slowly beat the air.

Besides those twelve sages, the mural also contained many other Saints and Divine Messengers.

The Divine Messenger at the highest point had an indifferent expression, but its eyes were extremely brutal, wanting nothing more than to swallow all living beings before it.

This was the Divine Messenger of destruction.

As she gazed at this Divine Messenger on the mural, Xu Yourong had a very calm expression.

In this period of time in which she had stood in the Great Hall of Light, she had not completely recovered from her injuries, had not completely recovered her true essence and Sacred Light, but she had already prepared for battle.

She had already forcefully brought her cultivation to its peak. Her Tong Bow in her left, the temple sword in her right, her two wings ready to take flight.

If a battle truly did begin, she would not hesitate to ignite her Heavenly Phoenix true blood.

Although she was still not at Star Condensation, in her current state, even Guan Bai using his most powerful Heavenly Dao Sword would not be a match for her.

But in this battle, her opponent was not Guan Bai, nor was it that Divine Messenger of destruction on the mural, but the old man behind the stone wall upon which this mural was drawn.

This old man was one of the supreme experts of the world.

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They were only separated by a single wall from the Great Hall of Light.

The Pope stood in front of the wheelchair and stared at Chen Changsheng, the river of stars within his eyes raging and surging, the expression on his face abnormally apathetic like a ruthless and ignorant god.

Chen Changsheng knew that the most crucial moment had come, but he actually grew more relaxed.

The truth was hidden behind the darkness and he could not see it clearly with his intellect, so he had chosen this crudest of methods to lift up the curtain of the night, even if it was only a corner.

Suddenly, the sound of water stopped.

A moment ago, clear water had been constantly flowing down onto the Green Leaf from the wooden ladle suspended in the air.

Chen Changsheng had seen the Pope watering his Green Leaf several times before and knew that the water within the ladle seemed infinite.

Yet today, the wooden ladle seemed to be out of water.

Just when the sound of water ceased, the Pope's body slightly trembled. Those incomprehensible runes of starlight speckled across his hempen robe deformed and grew indistinct.

The raging river of stars in the depths of the Pope's eyes also seemed to grow sluggish in that instant.

As the night wind caressed the Green Leaf and the starlight illuminated the night sky above, those elderly wrinkles that

contained unknowably many truths of history gradually deepened...

The Pope closed his eyes.

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Daoist Siyuan, several cardinals, and even more priests of the Li Palace were all standing outside the Great Hall of Light.

They had sensed the abnormalities within the hall, especially the raging energies dispersed to the outside by those rays of light, striking terror into their hearts.

In the holy radiance, they could faintly see two pure white wings unfurl behind Xu Yourong's body. To be able to see with their own eyes the advanced awakening of the legendary Heavenly Phoenix was worthy enough of their shock, but it was impossible for them to experience such a sensation because they knew that something major was about to occur.

Daoist Siyuan could no longer stand around. With a frigid face, he charged into the multitudinous rays of light within the hall.

As one of the Prefects of the Orthodoxy, he possessed the grand strength of peak Star Condensation, not even half a step from the Divine Domain. Those rays of light surging with energy could not

halt his steps.

Yet when he reached the depths of the great hall, he did not know what he should do.

He could faintly sense that a major event was taking place, but he did not know what.

The pure white wings slowly beat the air. Xu Yourong's left hand gripped a bow while her right hand gripped a sword, her calm expression containing a solemnity like she was about to confront a great foe. Yet in the end, she did nothing.

In this sort of situation, Daoist Siyuan could not possibly take the initiative and strike first. After all, Xu Yourong was the Holy Maiden of the south, possessing a status equal to the Pope. If he were to act first before asking questions, it would be extremely disrespectful, even reprehensible.

Xu Yourong truly was doing nothing, only quietly gazing at the mural on the wall.

She could clearly sense that although the rays of light exuded by the mural were still intense, that raging sensation was gradually returning to serenity.

She quietly gazed at the mural and the people on the mural quietly gazed back at her.

There, besides that Divine Messenger of destruction and the Saints high above in the clouds, were also the pitiful common people and the suffering twelve sages.

Those sages all had clear and bright eyes, their expressions warm and benevolent.

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The Pope opened his eyes. The raging river of stars had vanished from his eyes, and no vast sea of stars could be seen. There was only clear brightness.

His eyes were clear and bright, his expression warm and benevolent.

He turned and walked to the Green Leaf. He plucked the wooden ladle from the air, dipped it into the pool, and then poured the water into the pot.

The Green Leaf that had slightly yellowed at some point from the frenzied Qi instantly turned into a compelling green once more.

The Pope ladled some more water out of the pool and poured it over his body, drenching himself from head to toe.

He ladled up some more water and walked to the wheelchair.

Beads of water dripped from his white hair, soaking into the hempen robe that now stuck to his body, revealing the elderly and thin figure within.

With a splash, the Pope dumped all the water in the ladle over Chen Changsheng's head.

The dark hall was gloomy and rarely saw the sunlight, so the chill of the water in the pool was difficult to lessen. In an instant, Chen Changsheng was completely drenched.

A faint steam rose up from his body yet before it could disperse, the Pope dispelled it with a light brush of his sleeve.

His scalding body instantly returned to its normal temperature and that blood within his body that was seeping outwards was suppressed back.

The Pope placed the wooden ladle back in its original position, took up two dry towels, and gave Chen Changsheng one.

"I now know why your master gave you the name 'Changsheng' (long life)," the Pope said to Chen Changsheng as he wiped the water off his face.

Chen Changsheng wiped his face and did not speak.

"Indeed, eating you will give one the possibility of obtaining longevity." The Pope's voice was very indifferent.

Chen Changsheng's hand gripped the slightly moist towel as he spoke, "Master's explanation of my soul entering my essence blood, I truthfully didn't find very convincing."

"Every person has a soul; how could anyone be so tempted by it? What makes you different from everyone else is that your body contains an immense quantity of Sacred Light."

The Pope gazed at him, yet his gaze seemed to be extremely far away, like it was gazing at a completely different world.

Chapter 604 – Under The Starry Sky, There Is Nothing To Revere

"Sacred Light?" Chen Changsheng looked somewhat perplexed.

He naturally knew of the Sacred Light, it was just that although he was well-versed in the Daoist Canon, he had never entered the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green before, nor had he gone to Holy Maiden Peak. So why was his body filled with Sacred Light?

Suddenly, he recalled a name, a place very rarely mentioned and of which no explicit record existed in the Daoist Canon.

He had truly first heard this place's name on that snowy day at the beginning of the year when he discussed with Xu Yourong where Senior Su Li might have gone.

As expected, in the next moment, he heard that name once more in the Pope's words.

"Could your master really have gone to the Sacred Light Continent?" The Pope slightly creased his brow as if he had encountered an incomprehensible problem.

"But it is also impossible to be completely sure about this. There has always been a rumor that a portion of the descendants of the deceased imperials within the Cloud Grave passed through the spatial barrier and reached the Sacred Light Continent. As Emperor Taizong could no longer exterminate them, he halted his

manhunt. If that branch of the Chen Imperial clan really does live on that side, there might be an explanation for your situation."

Only then did Chen Changsheng understand that the Sacred Light Continent was not some imaginary existence, and that there might even be people who had gone to that side, and those people were highly likely to be his clansmen...

But there were some problems that still were not explained. "Could it be that people living in the Sacred Light Continent all have bodies filled with so much Sacred Light?"

"It is rumored the world of the Sacred Light Continent is brimming with limitless Sacred Light, but the situation you describe is still impossible—your situation is ultimately still special."

The Pope gazed at him piteously and said, "When you were still in the womb, your sun wheel was destroyed. Logically, it was utterly impossible for you to survive. I speculate that it was probably some amazing individual on the Sacred Light Continent who gathered up an unimaginable amount of Sacred Light and forcefully poured it into your body, helping you survive."

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng noted, "This survival has been somewhat exhausting."

"But in the end, living is still a good thing."

The Pope gently rubbed his head and said, "Go—if you continue to stay around, I'll really start to grow anxious over whether or not the Holy Maiden will burn the Great Hall of Light."

Chen Changsheng lowered his head, receiving the Pope's blessing of tender affection.

The firm gray stones resounded with the rolling of the wheelchair as Chen Changsheng maneuvered the wheelchair out of the hall.

The Pope gazed at his back and warned, "In the future, do not use this method to probe—it's very dangerous."

Chen Changsheng stopped the wheelchair. After a pause, he nodded.

"Whether it's human nature or the human heart, you cannot test them, because when you begin to think about methods to test them, that would mean that you have already begun to doubt."

The Pope lastly said, "And doubt is the source of all misfortune."

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It was early autumn and still not chilly. The great banyan tree by

the lake was still ostentatiously showing off its green leaves, and only on the grass lawn would one be able to spot the occasional slightly yellowed fallen leaf.

Today, the Orthodox Academy was under heavy guard. The Orthodoxy cavalry were patrolling vigilantly in the lane outside, and those restaurants which would normally have lanterns hung outside had also received the news and closed early, resulting in a desolate scene.

The South Stream Temple disciples did not remain at the Li Palace, nor did they go to the Imperial Palace. They had gone straight to the Orthodox Academy and begun erecting tents on its lawn, at the same time impolitely taking up the library.

The teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy were kept out by a curtain of silk. Seeing those beautiful female disciples of South Stream Temple going in and out, they truthfully did not feel too conflicted, and were even inwardly happy. However, they did not outwardly show this, still indignantly grumbling, "When did the Orthodox Academy come under the management of Holy Maiden Peak?"

Su Moyu and Xuanyuan Po were at this moment in the kitchen that had been rebuilt not even half a year ago. Based on what the South Stream Temple disciples had said, they were temporarily unable to return to their house. They could only wait for permission before they could return to that house and take with them clothes and everyday items. This naturally made them very angry.

"Just what has happened? For what reason should the people of Holy Maiden Peak stay in this academy? And if they even want to steal away our place, then where are we going to live?"

Zhexiu sat on the doorsill of the kitchen, looking at the newly planted scholar trees by the wall. As in the past, he was feigning a solitary self, modeling despair. The person replying to this question was naturally Tang Thirty-Six.

"There is one matter that all of you might not know, but I'm confident that you'll learn of it very soon, just like everyone else in the world."

He said very seriously to Su Moyu and Xuanyuan Po, "That guy Chen Changsheng has long been together with Xu Yourong."

These words were very coarse, but they could very clearly describe the present situation.

All was quiet. Su Moyu and Xuanyuan Po required quite some time to digest the shock in their minds.

Su Moyu's first reaction was to wrinkle his brow and glance at Tang Thirty-Six, chiding, "How can you use such coarse words to describe the Holy Maiden?"

Xuanyuan Po's response was very direct. His face full of praise, he sighed, "The principal is truly extraordinary, but...what about the Princess?"

It was Tang Thirty-Six's turn to be shocked. He looked at the pair and asked, "Could it be that neither of you is disappointed or angry?"

"Why would we be disappointed?"

"That pair of adulterers has kept it hidden from us for so long."

"Tang Tang, I'm warning you, when speaking of the Holy Maiden, do not use such vulgar words," Su Moyu solemnly rebuked.

Enraged, Tang Thirty-Six said, "You've all been driven out of your rooms, and you're still speaking on their behalf?"

Xuanyuan Po was a picture of honesty and frankness. "This is basically the newly-married wife bringing her family's servants on her visit. It's only right that we properly receive them."

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Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were clueless to the fact that Tang Thirty-Six had once more called them a pair of adulterers. They were currently discussing what had happened just now in the Li Palace.

"'Doubt is the source of all misfortune'—these were the last words Martial Uncle said to me. I know that was a lesson for me, but I think that when he was saying this, he might have been thinking about when my teacher sent me to the capital, at the same time stabbing a thorn between him and the Divine Empress. Then...to him, that incident could also be considered a sort of misfortune."

"His Holiness's heart embraces the world. The misfortune he feels should be the misfortune of the world, the misfortune of millions upon millions of people."

"But to be used by Teacher in this way, even if Martial Uncle really does believe that the Divine Empress should abdicate, would still feel rather uncomfortable."

"So he said that your teacher is truly a schemer. Right now, I really wish to know what sort of person he is."

Xu Yourong drew her gaze back from the distance and looked at Chen Changsheng.

The starlight and the winds of early autumn entered together through the window, falling upon his face. It was comfortable, just like the feeling he gave to others.

She did not know what sort of person Daoist Ji, or Principal Shang, was, but she only knew that she had never loathed a person so much before.

Even though that person was Chen Changsheng's teacher.

Precisely because he was Chen Changsheng's teacher.

Just who in the world would so coldly and impassively treat a student he had raised as a chess piece to be used, and was even unwilling to let go the senior brother who had once let his life go?

Chen Changsheng recalled the words recorded in the notebook Wang Zhice had left in the Lingyan Pavilion.

Wang Zhice's notebook did not specifically mention Daoist Ji, but in his recollections of paying visits to several of the ministers and famed generals of the Lingyan Pavilion before they died of illness, he would often encounter or hear that Daoist Ji had paid a visit.

As the divine doctor most skilled in the medical arts in that period of the Great Zhou Dynasty, to receive an imperial decree to visit and treat a great minister or famed general who was seriously ill was seemingly a very ordinary matter.

But thinking about it from the other way, it could also be said that not long after Daoist Ji visited those great ministers and famed generals on the order of Emperor Taizong, those people whose accomplishments would go down in history, one by one, returned to the sea of stars. And if one further considered that Daoist Ji was a legitimate successor of the Orthodoxy and after many years would reinstate his true name of Shang Xingzhou to wield power over the Orthodox Academy while secretly attempting

to overthrow the Divine Empress's rule...

"I think...Teacher was probably Emperor Taizong's most trusted confidant."

After Chen Changsheng said these words, he suddenly felt that the autumn wind blowing in from the window was somewhat chilly.

The room was quiet for a very long time.

If this matter really could be traced back to Taizong's era, if it really extended towards that distant and unknown continent, then it was far too complex.

Although he and she were no ordinary young man and woman, they were still two people who would not turn seventeen until two months later. They had no idea what exactly happened all those many years ago, so how could they see through this thick and heavy fog?

"At the moment, we can only be sure that His Holiness bears you no ill will," Xu Yourong stated.

Chen Changsheng nodded. This was a fact he had only confirmed after taking an enormous risk, but in truth, he still did not completely understand why the Pope had stayed his hand at that moment.

If it really was as the Pope had said and his body contained an innumerable quantity of Sacred Light, eating him would allow one to reach an unimaginable level and obtain a truly Grand Liberation, thus transcending the hardships of life and death. Even the Demon Lord was willing to risk entering Mount Han to eat him, so how could the Pope control himself?

Senior Yu Ren had said before that only a Saint could resist the allure of his blood. Resisting here spoke of ability, not necessarily will.

If Chen Changsheng himself were confronting this sort of situation, even he did not know how he would choose.

Just what was more important than this in the Pope's heart? It was naturally not authority.

He silently thought, it could only be the future of humanity.

Xu Yourong knew what he was thinking and answered, "It's out of reverence."

A figure like the Pope had already reached the pinnacle in terms of both cultivation and status. What could he possibly revere?

The common people raised their heads and saw the starry sky as well as that light in its deepest depths.

Perhaps that light was virtue, or principles, or romantic love, or

familial love, or a bowl of noodles with fried egg, or the blood within one's body, two loves deeply intertwined.

Not all people would preserve this sort of reverence.

Xu Yourong believed that Chen Changsheng's teacher did not.

To still preserve this reverence in one's heart even though one stood at the peak, this sort of person was truly extraordinary.

From beginning to end, from heaven to earth, from light to shadow, to revere nothing, this sort of person was truly terrifying.

Up until now, that person remained in the shadows. It was only known that he would assuredly use Chen Changsheng, but not what he would use Chen Changsheng for.

"I still insist on my opinion from Mount Han."

Xu Yourong continued, "We should tell everything to the Empress."

Chen Changsheng quietly gazed out the window, saying nothing for a very long time.

Chapter 605 – According To My Will, I Choose To Die

Without discussing the Pope or his senior brother and only considering his teacher and the Divine Empress, who did Chen Changsheng trust in more? Not long ago, he would not have even needed to think about the answer, but now, after long and serious thought, he dejectedly discovered that he could not trust either of them.

He had never met the Divine Empress, only understood several facets of her through Mo Yu, Xu Yourong, and Prince Chen Liu. Of course, he had read far too many records concerning the Divine Empress. He knew how incomparably powerful, cruel, and emotionless this woman who possessed the greatest authority in the world was. Now that he thought about it, his teacher was also this sort of person. Perhaps as one cultivated to higher realms, one began to revere and care about fewer things, and thus began to treat the world with more and more indifference? After stepping into the Divine Domain, one could no longer be counted amongst mortals, so one naturally would not possess many emotions of mortals either.

"If it really is as you said, then the Divine Empress and the Pope no longer have any space to maneuver. Even in these two years, everyone has been deceiving others as well as themselves, but they always have reasons for deceiving themselves. The conflict between the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy will swiftly intensify, and there's even a chance that the capital will be thrown into chaos tomorrow."

Chen Changsheng looked at Xu Yourong and said, "I'm not Wang Po, still able to bear the world on my shoulders after my family is bankrupted and killed, but if this world were to fall into disorder because of me, I would still feel a great deal of mental pressure. In addition, if I really am Crown Prince Zhaoming, I cannot imagine a single reason the Empress would let me go."

"If you really are Crown Prince Zhaoming, then the Empress is your mother by birth."

Xu Yourong saw his calm expression and knew that these words were not sufficient to convince him, or even enough to convince herself. A person like the Divine Empress was not easily constrained by so-called proper human relationships and familial love. Xu Yourong gazed out the window at the autumn trees and said, "I will plead to her on your behalf."

"If the Empress truly wishes to kill me, whose plea would be of any use? And I think that she now knows everything."

Chen Changsheng stood up and stood next to her by the window.

On the return journey from Mount Han, under Xu Yourong's meticulous care, although his injuries did not improve, they momentarily did not worsen either. With the power of the Heavenly Phoenix true blood, he even temporarily regained some strength.

The starlight illuminated Xu Yourong's sublimely beautiful face, making it seem even paler. "We still have to find a method to

resolve this."

"In truth, there is a very simple method."

"What method?"

"No matter what sort of schemes Teacher has secretly devised, they presumably involve me in some way. This being the case, if I disappear, these matters will naturally disappear with me."

The bubbles on the lake reflected the starlight, beautiful and yet illusory. In reality, the extremely thin walls of those bubbles were all made of water.

If there were no water, those bubbles would naturally not exist.

Xu Yourong faintly guessed at what he wished to do.

Disappearing in front of the eyes of people like the Divine Empress and Daoist Ji was an extremely challenging task.

There was only one situation in which both the Divine Empress and Daoist Ji would have no solution.

That was to truly depart this world.

The soul would return to the sea of stars, the flesh would

transform to dust.

Death.

"After leaving Mount Han, I've always been thinking, perhaps I've always been a person that was not meant to be alive.

"If I am Crown Prince Zhaoming, according to the theory about what the Empress offered up to the starry sky to change her fate, I simply shouldn't have been born. Perhaps it was just for that reason that when I was still in the womb, before I was even able to open my eyes, the sun wheel in my body was destroyed, and yet for some inexplicable reason, I didn't die.

"A person that should have died long ago actually managed to live ten-plus years; this in itself goes against the Heavenly Dao and naturally throws the world into chaos.

"Although I'm late by ten-some years, if I were to die now, it could also be considered a sort of remedy, just like building a new wall for a sheep pen.

"If I were to die, these schemes would all be useless. These conflicts would seemingly lose all meaning. Only peace and tranquility would remain, not a bad result."

Chen Changsheng stared into Xu Yourong's eyes and very solemnly said.

He spoke slowly, doing his utmost to clearly enunciate each word to ensure that his intentions could be heard.

Xu Yourong had heard and was sure of his meaning. Her expression was still calm, but her voice seemed to sink somewhat and was even rather angry. "I will not let you die."

"You understand. Even if you don't want me to die, I will still die in the end. It's just a matter of dying several dozen days earlier or several dozen days later."

Chen Changsheng seriously explained to her.

In his long conversation with the Pope in the Li Palace, they had spoken of a story from one thousand years ago, of another continent countless li away, and of his illness, but not in detail, much less about how to cure it.

It was already obvious that the Pope also could not cure his illness.

He didn't know if it was because he had been constantly pondering this matter since the age of ten, but now that the matter was truly right before his eyes, Chen Changsheng did not feel any fear.

Perhaps I've grown numb to it? he silently thought.

At this moment, he was very seriously pondering, since he was

going to die, what he should do before he died and how he should die.

At most, it would only be a difference of several dozen days. To die early or late was not important; what was important was on what occasion he should die.

To die from his meridians drying up and his blood being exhausted, or by being eaten by those supreme experts? How he died was not important; what was important was that he was the one that had decided upon it.

He cultivated the Dao of following his heart. As he could not live as he desired, it was only right that he value the conclusion.

As he thought of these problems, his eyes grew brighter and brighter.

When she saw his eyes, Xu Yourong was sure of his intentions and her heart was tinged by a deep sorrow.

"I will not permit you to die," she declared.

In Mount Han, on the journey, and just a moment ago, she would often say to Chen Changsheng, "I will not let you die."

Now she said, "I will not permit you to die."

It was only a couple of words, but they reflected wholly different meanings, represented utterly different emotions.

Normally, when girls said this sentence, their eyes would often be red and puffy, their voices choked with sobs.

But Xu Yourong was still very calm, even deliberately indifferent.

Yet even she did not perceive that when she made this declaration, her voice ever so slightly trembled.

It was the deepest despair.

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In the entire continent, only five people knew that Chen Changsheng was going to die.

To the common masses of the capital, this was just a very ordinary early autumn day. They lived life as normal, working and eating, walking and wandering, drinking and chatting, going over to take part in the spectacle after seeing the carriage of some noble house crash into a stone lion, hearing some small bit of news and then enthusiastically announcing their positions.

On this normal autumn day, shocking news circulated

throughout the capital, attracting the attention of the entire populace.

Many people had already known yesterday that the convoy from Holy Maiden Peak and the convoy from the Orthodoxy had arrived at the capital together, but only today in the early morning did they come to know that the Holy Maiden was not staying at the Li Palace, nor at the Imperial Palace, nor even returning to the Divine General of the East's estate. Instead, she had gone directly to the Orthodox Academy.

Moreover, it was said that she had stayed at the Orthodox Academy for the entire night.

"The Holy Maiden definitely stayed in the Orthodox Academy for one night!"

A pawnshop owner stood in the door to his store, waving his arms and shouting, his expression extremely solemn and respectful like he was narrating a scripture of the Orthodoxy.

No person could quickly accept this sort of matter, especially the young men. Whether they were scholars or hard laborers, they stood around the shopkeeper's door with very unsightly complexions.

Chapter 606 – The Downcast

Someone turned to the spluttering pawnshop owner and angrily shouted, "With what pair of eyes did you see it?"

The pawnshop owner gave the man a disdainful gaze, saying, "My sister's son is a student at the Orthodox Academy. The disciples of South Stream Temple are in there, so how could he not see them? Not only him, many people clearly saw that the Holy Maiden and Chen Changsheng were standing at the window upstairs and chatting."

The street turned silent.

Under the twinkling stars, a young man and woman standing by a window, their figures outlined in the starry light—this was a very beautiful scene.

However, no person was willing to cheer at this sort of scene.

After quite some time had passed, the crowd finally awoke from their stupor, their leftover shock giving way to confusion. From last year, it had been constantly rumored that Chen Changsheng had forcefully annulled his engagement with Xu Yourong. Although it was said that Chen Changsheng had seemingly changed his mind after the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness... had the Holy Maiden so easily forgiven him? She had just gone and stayed in the Orthodox Academy—could it be that she was really preparing to marry him? Then where was the Xu Estate's face? Would not Divine General of the East Xu Shiji, known for his cold,

aloof and stern manner, just become a joke?

In the early morning, Tang Thirty-Six, Xuanyuan Po, and Su Moyu were escorted by South Stream Temple disciples into their house to remove their luggage, preparing to move to the eastern part of the Orthodox Academy. Zhexiu was not one to do this sort of thing. His rather shabby luggage was carried by Xuanyuan Po.

Carrying their luggage, they stood in front of the tightly shut room door, looking somewhat downcast, somewhat pitiful.

"You still have to leave a little bit of face. After all, this is the Orthodox Academy and he's the principal," Tang Thirty-Six called out to the tightly shut door. "Even if it's for the sake of his own safety, you've acted far too wantonly. What need is there to surround this place with the South Stream Temple's sword array and even drive us out? This is the capital, not Mount Han. Even the Demon Lord wouldn't dare to come here."

This was Chen Changsheng's room, but he was talking to Xu Yourong.

A night had passed, and the disciples of South Stream Temple and the teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy knew that she had never left that room.

The door to the room remained tightly shut. It was not pushed upon nor did a voice emerge from it.

Xu Yourong sat at the table by the window, watching Chen Changsheng soundly asleep on the bed. Occasionally, she would extend her finger to lightly rub away the creases of pain on his brow.

The Tong Bow was held in her left hand and emitted a faint Qi that formed a barrier, ensuring that the external noises would not disturb Chen Changsheng's rest.

But she had heard Tang Thirty-Six's words.

She knew that her suddenly bringing the disciples of South Stream Temple with her back to the capital would inevitably attract all sorts of discussion and shock, but she did not care.

She had South Stream Temple's sword array surrounding this house and had even ejected Tang Thirty-Six and the others. Her actions seemed rather inhumane, but they were because with Chen Changsheng's current circumstances, in order to obtain true safety, it was best to not meet anyone. Her keeping out Tang Thirty-Six and the others was good for both sides.

Seeing the door still tightly shut, Tang Thirty-Six rather angrily turned and walked away.

Walking out of the house, stepping across the grass lawn and crossing that concealed and inactive sword intent, they suddenly saw a middle-aged man standing under a tree by the lake.

This middle-aged man had inky brows and a look of indifference, and was solemn and stern to the extreme. As his clothes were ruffled by the morning breeze, one could faintly smell the scent of blood.

Ye Xiaolian and ten-some South Stream Temple disciples blocked the middle-aged man's way. They all looked rather nervous, but none of them had any means of dealing with this man.

Because this was the temple master's father, Divine General of the East Xu Shiji.

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"Returned to the capital, why didn't you return to the estate but instead stayed here? Truly throwing away all the face of my Xu Family!"

Xu Shiji looked at the haggard appearance of his daughter that her beautiful looks could not conceal. He did not feel any sort of pity, but actually felt rather uncomfortable. When he left the estate, he had already planned to speak as gently as possible, yet he could not suppress the indifference in his voice, his words so brimming with cold that they were like stern rebukes.

The grass lawn by the lake was very quiet, with a cloth curtain cutting off the distant prying gazes, but the South Stream Temple

disciples could hear his words and grew displeased.

Even if you're the Holy Maiden's father, how can you use such a tone of voice to speak to her?

Some young female disciples such as Ye Xiaolian treated Xu Yourong as a god, holy and inviolable. Their emotions aroused, sword intent and hostile intent rose up together.

Xu Shiji sensed that hostility and sword intent. He turned once more to his daughter silently standing by the lake and he found his rage even harder to suppress. He yelled, "Could it be that you dare to commit patricide!"

Xu Yourong turned to her father and asked, "Father, where did these words come from?"

Her voice was very calm, very soft, very light, and so this explanation did not sound like an explanation. Of course, there was no admission of wrongdoing either.

Xu Shiji's complexion turned even more unsightly as he thought of many matters from the past.

When she was very small, Xu Yourong was raised by the Grand Minister and he and the Madam could not touch her. When she was five, the true Phoenix blood in her body awakened and she was brought by the Divine Empress into the palace. Then she also just so happened to encounter the Holy Maiden, who had come to view

the mausoleum to relieve her boredom. Thus, Xu Yourong became the student of these two Saints, and so his turn to educate her was pushed further back.

The common people's evaluation of Xu Shiji was not at all high, but that was primarily due to problems with his personal morality, like his stance towards the Tianhai clan and towards Chen Changsheng at the beginning. However, nobody would deny that his ability was a perfect match for his status as Divine General of the Great Zhou. In the snowy plains to the north, he had achieved much military merit. He managed his armies with extreme strictness, and managed his estate like he did his armies. Whether it was his deputy general with a special family background stationed at Snow Pass or the old people of his estate, they would all remain silent out of fear in front of him, not daring to voice any sort of objections, yet...he had no means of controlling his own daughter.

Because he did not have the right.

To any father, this fact would not bring the slightest joy, but since the Xu Estate wished to enjoy the glory and benefits brought by Xu Yourong, they had to accept this fact.

But in the end, he was still her father, she his daughter. He believed that she still had to give him some respect, just as she had in the last few years.

However, this morning by this lake in the Orthodox Academy, he realized that he had just been deceiving himself with these thoughts.

"What an unworthy daughter..."

Xu Shiji's voice was cold as ice. His right hand trembled as if it would strike Xu Yourong's face in the next moment.

Xu Yourong calmly gazed at her father. She would naturally not return a blow.

The gazes of the South Stream Temple disciples sharpened, and Ye Xiaolian and the other young girls even tightened the grips on their swords.

It was just then that a thin old man arrived. The sword array of South Stream Temple was of no use against this old man. Not because he was very powerful, but because he was the chief eunuch of the Great Zhou Imperial Palace, a member of the Divine Empress's inner circle who received no small measure of trust. Moreover, when he arrived, he held aloft an imperial edict.

"The Empress says, do not let a trifling matter like this influence the affection between father and daughter."

The chief eunuch expressionlessly declared to Xu Shiji.

The Divine Empress's words were clearly meant for two people, but the eunuch only gazed at Xu Shiji. The meaning was naturally crystal clear.

This was a warning.

Xu Shiji's expression turned even more unsightly as he thought, this sort of unfilial deed only amounts to a trifling matter?

Is she my daughter or the Empress's daughter?

He could only think of this and not show it on his face, and even had to force his face to grow calmer.

He glanced at Xu Yourong and said no more, leaving the Orthodox Academy.

His back was somewhat downcast, looking like a lion that had been expelled from its pride.

Xu Yourong gazed at her father's back in silence, her thoughts a mystery.

The chief eunuch turned to her with a much humbler expression and whispered, "The Empress invites my lady into the palace."

Xu Yourong received the edict and replied, "Wait for me a moment."

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"I don't know how to confront her, and between her and the Orthodoxy, I absolutely cannot stand on her side."

Chen Changsheng refused Xu Yourong's idea to go together with her to the palace. The 'her' in this sentence naturally referred to the Divine Empress.

Xu Yourong said nothing. In truth, she also knew that bringing Chen Changsheng into the palace was an extremely risky endeavor. She knew what sort of arrogance and disregard these Saints who embraced the world and even more held towards these sorts of emotions. The Divine Empress had not done anything to Chen Changsheng in these two years because she had to consider the Li Palace, or also because she had found it impossible to be sure. Now, all those clues pointed to that unresolved case from ten-odd years ago. No person could guarantee what would occur if she were to see Chen Changsheng in the Imperial Palace.

"You don't have to worry about me." Chen Changsheng had seen the look on her face and knew what she was thinking. He soothed, "You used the Sacred Light technique right before entering the capital, and yesterday, Martial Uncle used Sacred Water to bathe my body, creating another barrier. In this short time, there shouldn't be a problem, and won't South Stream Temple's sword array always be outside?"

Xu Yourong said no more and departed.

As Chen Changsheng stood by the window and watched her figure gradually fade into the distance, his expression became somewhat downcast.

He knew better than anyone else his current situation, better than her and better than the Pope.

His meridians had all been melted and ruptured by star radiance and could not be repaired.

His soul had seeped into flesh and bones along with his blood and was impossible to remove.

His injuries could be controlled, but his vitality was constantly being lost.

His body and fate had long been riddled with holes, tattered beyond belief.

Any other person at this time would have long since lost their wits and become downcast, but he still maintained his calm.

He went downstairs and walked to the Orthodox Academy on the other side of the curtains.

With Xu Yourong absent, the South Stream Temple disciples were utterly incapable of preventing him from leaving. Although the sword array was frightening, how could they allow it to fall upon his body?

There were many sculptures around the main hall of the Orthodox Academy that still showed signs of that heaven-shaking coup from ten-odd years ago. The fountain had been repaired, but the stone beasts were still somewhat damaged.

He looked at Su Moyu and said, "After today, I might have to hand this place over to you."

He turned to Tang Thirty-Six and said, "If possible, it would be best if you could delay your return to Wenshui for one year."

He then turned to Xuanyuan Po and advised, "You shouldn't keep thinking about how your injuries are already better, you still have to keep eating medicine."

Finally, he turned to Zhexiu and said, "It's impossible for me to keep treating you, but I'll try as quickly as possible to write out the case history. You absolutely can't give up on being cured."

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Chapter 607 – Matters For Afterwards

Su Moyu and the others didn't know what to say. After looking at each other's eyes, they realized that they still didn't know what to say.

"Just what are you saying?" Tang Thirty-Six stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes.

"I'm going to die. I can probably live for about twenty more days."

Chen Changsheng's voice was very calm, his expression very indifferent. It was like he was speaking about a very ordinary affair.

It's going to rain, mother's going to get married, who is going to take in the clothes on the roof?

[The newly added peppers in the jar have already had their holes poked](#), and don't forget to occasionally add water to the jar's trough, or else white stuff might start growing in the jar, and even the saltiest pickled vegetables will have to be thrown out.

(TN: Punching holes in peppers is part of the process for pickling peppers. Chinese pickling jars have a trough around the lid that holds water. The water acts as a seal around the jar that keeps external air from entering.)

I hear from the elders that if there's white in the pickling jar, it can still be saved by adding in strong alcohol, but how can such pickled vegetables be considered perfect?

Look how pitch-black it is over there, like the den of some thief. It seems that it really will rain.

Silence, a deathly stillness.

There was only the gushing of the fountain.

After a very long time, Tang Thirty-Six finally managed to open his mouth once more. "What sort of joke are you playing?"

They were all keenly aware that Chen Changsheng was the person least prone to making jokes, and was even less likely to joke about such matters, so they all had awful complexions.

Seeing the expressions of the four, for some reason, Chen Changsheng felt somewhat apologetic.

Xuanyuan Po's voice was somewhat shaky. "What's wrong?"

Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu had gone together with him to Mount Han and knew that he had been heavily injured by the Demon Lord. They had seen him break into Star Condensation and then collapse, but they did not know that the problem was so serious.

Because Chen Changsheng had not mentioned it, they had not asked. Even now, they still did not inquire on what had happened,

only looked at him.

There were some things that still required explanation, because only when they were clearly explained could he finish handing over things.

Chen Changsheng said to the four, "I have an illness, an illness from the moment I was brought out of the womb. My meridians have always had problems. For a very long time, I've known that I would not live past the age of twenty. I've never told any of you about this, which is my fault. I originally thought that I could resolve my problem, but I didn't expect for my illness to start acting up in Mount Han. My meridians are all shattered with no method of reconnecting, so I'm probably going to die."

"Just what are you wanting to say? Were you communicating your last words just now?"

Tang Thirty-Six's straight eyebrows perked up as he teased, "If you're sick, go find a doctor. What are you doing playing out such a tragic scene with us?"

This teasing was only to conceal the unease and fear behind these words, and also an indescribable anger.

"I am the best doctor."

Chen Changsheng looked at him as he explained, his voice very calm and his look very sincere.

He was not boasting, only asserting a fact, however, it still had the same effect as before, making the four speechless.

If the circumstances were not so special, perhaps Tang Thirty-Six would have produced a quite intense response, but now, he only kept silent.

"The Pope?" Zhexiu suddenly asked.

Chen Changsheng shook his head.

Su Moyu questioned, "Then the Holy Maiden? Her Sacred Light technique is regarded as unparalleled—how can it not cure your illness?"

Tang Thirty-Six was also thinking along this line. He was prepared to say something when he suddenly recalled a few matters and choked those words back down.

On the journey back from Mount Han, he and Zhexiu had personally witnessed the fact that Xu Yourong had never left Chen Changsheng's side. Associating this with the fact that after returning to the capital, Xu Yourong had stayed at the Orthodox Academy, caring not for the rumors or the face of the Divine General of the East's estate, it was clear that she had long known of this matter and she also had no means of resolving it.

The scene settled once more into silence, everyone's complexion

unsightly to the extreme.

Chen Changsheng said apologetically, "Sorry."

Tang Thirty-Six found himself once more incapable of suppressing his emotions. Gnashing his teeth, he asked in a cold voice, "You're going to die; just who are you saying sorry to?"

"Of the myriad matters in the world, only one's death is one's own matter, but I think there's a problem with your attitude."

Upon hearing this shocking news, Zhexiu had displayed the most calm. He looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and said, "Since you're still alive at present, you cannot regard yourself as a dead man. Even if you can only live in these days with the thought that you're going to die, you still have to put the focus on the word 'afterwards'."

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning.

In the blizzard-ridden plains of the north, Zhexiu, who had been exiled from his tribe and had a terrible illness, still incessantly struggled. He was the most experienced in this sort of matter.

"Yes, but I still have to make some preparations in advance. There are some matters that require planning."

Chen Changsheng turned to Tang Thirty-Six and said, "Yourong, she...and I once had an engagement. She is my fiancée. Even

though the engagement has already been annulled and I won't be able to marry her anyhow due to the current situation, I'm still going to treat her as my wife. But all the property that should have been divided was already dealt with at the beginning of the year. I'm going to sort out some things, and when the time comes, I want you to help me give them to her."

Tang Thirty-Six had grown used to thinking of a few jeers, like 'what things of value does someone as poor as you have?' In the end, however, he said nothing, only silently nodded his head.

Chen Changsheng followed by saying, "Luoluo is my student. Leave one-third of my property to her, and also leave one-third to my senior brother. The last third should be left in the academy. Students whose family finances are somewhat lacking can apply to use it. As for you guys, I've gifted swords to you, so I won't leave anything else."

Zhexiu and Xuanyuan Po were not at all well-off, but with Tang Thirty-Six here, he had no need to be concerned.

"Are you really handing over the Orthodox Academy to me?" Su Moyu asked. "I'm somewhat uneasy because this burden is somewhat heavy."

As he spoke, he gazed at those students in the distance, studying in the buildings and on verandas.

In the autumn of last year, the Orthodox Academy had enrolled a hundred-plus new students. Under the laws of the Great Zhou

Dynasty and the Orthodoxy, these new students had no means of transferring to another school. In other words, they had put their fates together with the Orthodox Academy's fate. If Chen Changsheng truly did die, the Orthodox Academy would naturally not have its present glory, so how long would it be able to last?

"Just let me do it," Tang Thirty-Six expressionlessly said. "It can't be helped that nature plays the leading role in one's fate. Moreover, when the principal farts, it should be this academy superintendent that steps forward."

Chen Changsheng was somewhat startled by this statement. After that long conversation they had by the lake, he knew more than anyone else just how much pressure Tang Thirty-Six bore. He lived a free life in the capital and the Orthodox Academy, but as he matured, the Wenshui Tangs would assuredly demand that he return as quickly as possible to inherit the clan.

Tang Thirty-Six continued, "Although that father of mine isn't all that talented, he's still my father. And besides, the old man's health is quite good, so there shouldn't be too much of a rush."

Chen Changsheng knew that this was a lie. Even if the Wenshui Tangs were not in a rush to raise up their successor, they also wouldn't be willing to expose Tang Thirty-Six to danger and pause for an extended period of time in the capital.

"If you really do die, I'll delay my return for two years. They should understand."

Tang Thirty-Six firmly warned, "So you absolutely cannot deceive me. When the time comes, you have to die."

This was naturally a joke, but it wasn't amusing and was delivered very stiffly. Especially at this sort of occasion, it was as stiff as a frozen mantou that had been left out for two nights, so choking that nobody could speak, and very difficult to accept.

Su Moyu looked at Chen Changsheng and soothed, "Relax, I'll remain behind to watch over him."

Zhexiu said, "If you do die, after I finish with that matter, I'll return north."

He was a hunter from the north who would occasionally stop by at the bustling capital to treat and recover from his illness. After the treatment was over, he would naturally leave.

But what matter did he want to finish?

The mood became rather oppressive, and after Zhexiu spoke, a little chill was added into the mix.

They all knew what Zhexiu needed to do before leaving the capital: kill Zhou Tong.

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Chen Changsheng was the first student of the Orthodox Academy in ten-odd years.

And it was also precisely because of him that the Orthodox Academy [obtained a new life](#).

(TN: A reminder that 'new student' (新生) can also be read as 'new life'.)

If he had to talk about what he wanted to let go the least in the capital, then besides those people, it was naturally this beautiful and secluded academy.

After he left this world, could the Orthodox Academy continue to exist? Could it continue to exist as it did now?

Tang Thirty-Six and Su Moyu had given their promises, and after Zhexiu had received Tang Thirty-Six's promise that he would pay enough money, he also indicated he would at any time kill someone for the Orthodox Academy's sake and asked him to be at ease when he left. At that moment, Chen Changsheng felt that perhaps he should close his eyes and put on the appearance of quietly passing away?

When they turned to Xuanyuan Po, wanting to know what he planned, Xuanyuan Po made a sudden statement and then left. What he said was, "I'm going."

Xuanyuan Po left extremely quickly. There was no sloppiness, no

hesitation. It was like someone was pursuing him or the Orthodox Academy was about to collapse.

"This is what is meant by rats fleeing a sinking ship?"

After confirming that Xuanyuan Po had even taken away the heavy sword in the kitchen, Tang Thirty-Six inhaled a breath of cold air.

Zhexiu impassively noted, "It's obvious that he's in a rush to return to White Emperor City."

Confused, Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Why is he returning to White Emperor City?"

"To find Princess Luoluo and tell her that Chen Changsheng is going to die. Only Princess Luoluo can request His Majesty the White Emperor to come to the capital and treat Chen Changsheng."

After Zhexiu finished this statement, he then turned to Chen Changsheng and said, "You see, many people do not want you to die. Princess Luoluo most certainly does not wish for you to die, and don't forget that you have to treat my illness. If you die, I might follow you in another two years, so it's best that you live."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I will struggle to the utmost."

To him, the Heavenly Dao, or fate, had never been fair and

always been very cruel, but this world had treated him rather well. Many people were unwilling to let him die, like Luoluo, Xuanyuan Po and Tang Thirty-Six. In addition, if he did die, what would happen to Zhexiu? Or the Black Dragon? Who would worry about her?

Just when he was thinking about these matters, a guest arrived at the Orthodox Academy. This guest had a noble status but was also extremely troublesome.

If Xu Yourong had not been summoned to the Imperial Palace and Chen Changsheng were still in the house, then there would have been no opportunity to meet with Prince Chen Liu, let alone speak to him.

"You...really are Zhaoming?"

The rays of the sun leaked through the gaps in the splashing of the fountain and fell upon Prince Chen Liu's handsome face, a mottled light that produced a complex image. It just so happened that his present expression was complex and sorrowful.

In these past two years, Chen Changsheng and this descendant of the Chen Imperial clan had not met much, but their relationship was quite good.

He did not expect that the prince would ask this question so directly.

Chapter 608 – How To Spend The Rest Of My Life?

"I don't know."

Chen Changsheng had no means of admitting or denying that he was Zhaoming because even now, he was still incapable of confirming his background.

At the moment, the only matter he could be sure of was that he was a member of the Chen Imperial clan. In other words, Prince Chen Liu in front of him was his brother.

To turn from friends into brothers, this sort of feeling was rather strange.

Perhaps because Prince Chen Liu had sensed his current mood, he changed the subject by saying, "Crown Prince Zhaoming's health was poor since the moment he was born. I was still very young back then and was living in the Imperial Palace the entire time, but I never had the opportunity to see him."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, if I really am Crown Prince Zhaoming and my sun wheel was destroyed while I was in the Divine Empress's stomach, it's only natural that my health not be very good.

"If you really are Crown Prince Zhaoming, what will you do?"

Prince Chen Liu's voice suddenly became much lighter, but the gaze he aimed at Chen Changsheng seemed to blaze, brimming with hope and longing.

Chen Changsheng did not know how to answer this question. It was at this very moment that he suddenly understood that the most important aspect of Crown Prince Zhaoming's identity was... he was the legitimate successor to the position of Emperor of the Great Zhou.

"No matter what the Divine Empress has done in these years, how many elders of the imperial clan she has killed, there is one matter that is impossible to deny: she is Emperor Xian's wife. Crown Prince Zhaoming is her son and also Emperor Xian's son. If the imperial throne of the Great Zhou is empty, no person has more right than Crown Prince Zhaoming to sit upon it."

Prince Chen Liu looked into his eyes and solemnly proclaimed.

Because Chen Changsheng had not admitted that he was Crown Prince Zhaoming, his words did not speak of 'you', but of 'Crown Prince Zhaoming'.

But the intentions within had been made [as clear as day](#). Anyone could understand.

(TN: 'Clear as day' in this case uses the words 昭昭若明, playing on Zhaoming, which is written as 昭明.)

The Divine Empress had reigned for two-hundred-some years and ran the Imperial Court with an iron fist. The several major incidents in the last ten-odd years, as well as Zhou Tong's methods,

had suppressed the Chen Imperial clan into an extremely miserable state. At present, no trace of the Chen Imperial clan's influence in the capital could be found, at least on the surface. Prince Chen Liu, this sole scion, was the sole strand of face the Divine Empress left for the Imperial clan, a small comfort to the common people. It was also a symbol, as Prince Chen Liu was just like some lonely ghost, utterly devoid of power.

However, the Chen Imperial clan that had once charged out of Tianliang County to possess the world, and produced individual after individual of heaven-shaking talent like Chen Xuanba, the previous Crown Prince, and Emperor Taizong, had far more resources than imagined by the common people. It was utterly impossible for them to be so easily eliminated from the capital. They undoubtedly had many resources hidden away in the capital. Perhaps this strength was concealed in the Orthodoxy or in the Imperial Court, and it could even be in the Imperial Palace. And in the provinces and counties outside the capital, the strength of the Imperial clan was actually relatively intact, with even a possibility of shaking the Imperial Court.

Take Tianliang County, for instance. If the Great Zhou truly did become unsettled, then whether official or commoner, all the people of that county would firmly stand on the side of the Chen Imperial clan.

The Chen Imperial clan had several hundred descendants scattered amongst the provinces and counties, each having their own faction. Of these factions, the strongest was the one belonging to the Prince of Xiang.

The Prince of Xiang was Prince Chen Liu's father.

It was unknown whether Prince Chen Liu had received the Prince of Xiang's approval to speak these words to Chen Changsheng, but he had the right to represent the Prince of Xiang's stance.

If Chen Changsheng truly was Crown Prince Zhaoming and truly wished to ascend to the imperial throne, obtaining the support of the Prince of Xiang's faction was extremely important.

However, Chen Changsheng did not have much of a reaction.

Prince Chen Liu's eyes revealed regret and confusion.

Who would not want the imperial throne of the Great Zhou?

Chen Changsheng did not want it, at least not now. Right now, he was simply not in the mood to contemplate these so-called grand affairs.

'The only important events in life are birth and death' was the reasoning.

Prince Chen Liu could not remain at the Orthodox Academy for much longer. Given the rumor that Chen Changsheng was Crown Prince Zhaoming, this meeting was already taboo.

The Divine Empress's people were assuredly keeping watch over

this place. The imperial edict from just now was proof of this.

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "Do not stand on the Empress's side just because of Yourong, and don't rush to make a decision. Watch more, think more, about just what my Great Zhou Dynasty requires the most."

Chen Changsheng looked at his handsome face, looked at the unswerving determination about it. He thought of those rumors he had heard upon entering the capital, that the Empress thought very highly of Prince Chen Liu, and was somewhat confused.

Prince Chen Liu seemed to know what he was thinking and explained, "The Empress has treated me well, but she is mistaken."

Chen Changsheng did not ask a question like 'just who determines what's right and wrong', because he knew that every person had made their own conclusion on the state of the dynasty in these past years, every person had their own pair of eyes.

"The Empress's mistake does not lie in her use of Zhou Tong, does not lie in her use of Cheng Jun, nor does it lie in her use of the so-called [Eight Tigers](#)."

(TN: 'The Eight Tigers' seems to refer to a group of eight powerful eunuchs that controlled the imperial court during the reign of Emperor Zhengde in the Ming Dynasty.)

As Prince Chen Liu spoke of those famously treacherous officials, his expression was solemn. "...The Empress's mistake does not lie in her using people wrongly, or using the wrong people, but when she thought of using these people, intentionally using these people,

she did not care about anyone's death, only about her own power and position. She placed all her energy on the Imperial Court and killed countless people that she thought her enemy, but she forgot where the true enemies of my Great Zhou Dynasty are."

The Great Zhou was the legitimate dynasty of the human world, representing the fundamental benefit of all humanity. Its enemy was naturally in the north: the demons.

"Look at the state of this country in the past two hundred years. The Great Zhou Empire is at its peak, yet we have not advanced one inch in the north, and have even lost battles. For country and people, we suffer in the blizzards, yet people are still occasionally snatched away by the demons to serve as their army provisions. Why does such a situation exist? Because the Empress's thoughts are not there."

Prince Chen Liu stared into his eyes and said in a low voice, "No matter how high her cultivation, how awesome her power, or how extraordinary her trickery, she is still a woman—her insight and manner are inherently lacking. It is impossible for her to lead us to victory in this way, so she has no right to continue sitting upon the imperial throne."

The sun gradually moved west. It was not yet twilight, yet the sky gave a feeling of red warmth.

Chen Changsheng walked back through the curtains. Under the uneasy and hesitant gazes of the South Stream Temple disciples, he climbed the great banyan tree. Standing on a branch, he looked into the distance.

The capital was enveloped in the early autumn sun. Black eaves and white walls could be seen everywhere, people weaving through the street, endless streams of horses and carriages. It was bustling to the extreme, safe and joyous.

The people living here would find it very difficult to imagine the pressure the human armies had to bear in the snowy plains to the north, what sort of bleak lives the people up there lived.

These people currently living had probably long forgotten that one thousand years ago, the vanguard of the Demon Army had besieged Luoyang for three entire months, that the frontline was only four hundred li from the capital.

He silently pondered Prince Chen Liu's words for a very long time, then he ceased thinking about them and began contemplating his own concerns.

The great banyan tree stood by the lake, and the lake was within the Orthodox Academy. Here was a lush lawn of grass.

He had lived here for a bit more than two years. When he first entered this place, the name of the Orthodox Academy was completely covered in ivy and this place was a forgotten garden of the past.

He had encountered the Black Goat here and also that nanny from the Imperial Palace. Later on, in the palace, he had caught a passing glance of that nanny and had almost forgotten what she

looked like.

That bamboo carriage pulled by the Black Goat was not the nanny's, but Mo Yu's.

It had been a long time since he had seen Mo Yu, a long time since he had smelled her scent on his bed or seen a hair that she had left behind. Perhaps Xu Yourong was the reason?

The Orthodox Academy back then had only him.

On the other side of that wall was the Hundred Herb Garden. A girl once jumped over that wall, and thus, the Orthodox Academy came to have another person.

Then, Xuanyuan Po came, Tang Thirty-Six came. Even later on, Zhexiu and Su Moyu also came. After enrolling new students last autumn, this place became bustling beyond compare.

When he thought of that period at the beginning with just him and Luoluo at this place, he fell under the illusion that it was a lifetime ago.

Xuanyuan Po had already left, presumably madly rushing in the direction of the Red River. After Luoluo found out, she would presumably be grief-stricken.

After thinking about it, Chen Changsheng was somewhat comforted. He then realized that as it turned out, it was impossible

for him to be at peace with himself, that he still very much cared about these things.

Tragedy was perhaps taking shreds of beauty for other people to see. Sorrow was to let people see beauty yet make it impossible to approach, ultimately forcing them to turn and depart, thus vanishing from sight.

Seeing the capital under the autumn sun and thinking about how he would soon have to depart this beautiful world, he properly began to feel sorrow.

As he looked into the distance, he suddenly gave two shouts. There was no specific meaning behind these shouts, just that he wanted to shout to prove that he existed.

The disciples of South Stream Temple and the students of the Orthodox Academy looked up at the great banyan tree, at him whose body seemed to melt into the sunlight, and were deeply confused. Upon hearing his shouts, they were shocked. The South Stream Temple disciples thought, how could the Holy Maiden like this sort of person? The Orthodox Academy students thought, it turns out that the principal was this sort of person.

Tang Thirty-Six, Zhexiu, and Su Moyu looked at that place, their expressions grave, their hearts heavy.

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If you were to know that only several dozen days remained of your life, how would you pass your time? Compile all those things you wanted to do but never did into a wishlist and then sell your home and fields and go off to achieve these things? Or would you hide away in some dark corner of your room, your face bathed in tears every day? Or would you disregard all morals and laws, indulging in your deepest desires and evil thoughts?

As Chen Changsheng stood on the great banyan tree in the Orthodox Academy and considered this question, in the jail the Department for Purging Officials in the depths of the alley of the Northern Military Department, the once-imperial physician Doctor Zheng Sun and the once-official of the Ministry of Rites Lord Yang Xiushen were also confronting this question. But they did not have the energy to ponder how to pass these days, only how to lessen these days as much as possible.

Ever since they were secretly imprisoned in the Zhou Prison, they had wanted to die. The sooner the better, because here, life truly was inferior to death.

A sharp metal wire pierced into Yang Xiushen's left ear and then protruded out from his right, carrying along with it something similar to brain matter. But there was not much blood. In the torture of these past few days, he had lost too much blood, and perhaps his hot blood had gradually dissipated as well.

Chapter 609 – How To Remove This Concern?

With the hot blood dissipated, when the execution was carried out, it would be difficult to hear the powerful curses and recitations of the Great Zhou's laws. However, Yang Xiushen was still breathing, even though he was on his dying gasps, exhaling less than he inhaled, his breath like gossamer. His bones were still hard, even though his ribs had been shattered into ten or more pieces.

Yang Xiushen had never participated in the Grand Examination. He had entered the court as an official through the regular imperial examination. He had worked diligently in the government for many years before finally being recognized by the Divine Empress and promoted to a secretary of the palace. Everyone believed that he should have been thankful for the Divine Empress's kindness, yet he continued to act as he did in the past, quietly concerning himself with his own matters and recording all that occurred in the Imperial Palace.

This lasted until a certain autumn day four years after the bloody incident of the Orthodox Academy, when he suddenly submitted a memorial to the throne.

This memorial was fully aimed at Zhou Tong and also criticized the Divine Empress at the end.

The Divine Empress was greatly displeased and had him locked away in Zhou Prison. In Zhou Prison, he suffered countless tortures, but in the end, he endured and survived. Finally, he was

pardoned, released, and transferred to the Ministry of Rites.

That was a matter from ten-odd years ago.

Ten-odd years later, he was once more jailed in Zhou Prison. This time, he had no colleagues in the court to call upon and the Divine Empress also seemed to forget his existence.

Through the bars, Zhou Tong gazed at the mass of mangled flesh lying on the disorderly straw. After squinting for a very long time, he finally confirmed that this was his greatest enemy from that period in the past.

"Lord Yang is truly a loyal and dependable official. After suffering so much torture, you still did not speak a single word."

Zhou Tong continued, "But that matter from back then was not known only by you."

Upon hearing his voice, Yang Xiushen's body very arduously moved somewhat on the straw.

"Doctor Sun has just started talking." Zhou Tong stood up and began walking out of the prison, his hands held behind his back. "I came today only to bid you farewell."

Hearing this, Yang Xiushen's body tensed and then suddenly relaxed.

He had persisted until now and finally had a reason to no longer persist. Of course, this did not mean that he would start talking, only that he could rest.

The sounds of heavy objects being moved could be heard in the gloomy and sinister prison cell. Ten-odd sacks packed with soil were moved into the cell by the officials of the Department for Purging Officials and then pressed over Yang Xiushen's body.

At the very beginning, Yang Xiushen's body would still twitch a couple of times, letting out a few muffled and indistinct noises. Ultimately, his voice grew softer and softer until it ceased.

Black and foul, almost solid blood flowed out from his eyes and nose. He could no longer breathe, but his eyes remained open.

Even if he was dead, he still wanted his eyes open. He stubbornly kept them open as if he wanted to see if the Heavenly Dao existed in this world, if there was such a thing as justice.

The autumn sun shone over the courtyard. The crabapple trees had no blossoms, but they were still beautiful.

Zhou Tong stood under the crabapple trees, his face slightly pale, most likely because it had been many years since he had seen much of the sun.

An official of the Department for Purging Officials stood behind

him, his heart and body both cold. Not even the sun was able to warm him.

An official of the Imperial Court had died just like that.

Logically, this should have been a very normal affair. Similar things had happened many times, but this official of the Department for Purging Officials was Zhou Tong's most trusted subordinate and had followed him for several decades, so he knew that this time was different from all the other times. Those officials of the Imperial Court that had died in Zhou Prison in the past had often died without a trial, an act which logically was in serious defiance of the laws of the Great Zhou, but not in defiance of the Divine Empress's will.

The Divine Empress no longer wished to see those officials, so those officials quietly died.

But this time was different. He was keenly aware that Lord Zhou Tong was privately investigating something. The Divine Empress did not know, and also did not know of Yang Xiushen's death.

He turned to Zhou Tong, his gaze resting on the great crimson official's robe. Gone was its usual appearance—it now seemed to contain no boundless sea of blood or fiendish intent that filled the heavens, but a sense of anxiety, even fear.

Why had Lord Zhou Tong acted this way? To risk the Empress's rage and secretly interrogate so many people, just what did he want to know? What matter was he so fearful of?

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If Black Robe could be called the most secretive person in the world, then Zhou Tong could be called the person that knew the most secrets in the world.

To him, secrets were like money and treasure, power and status. The more he had, the better, and the more he had, the safer he would feel.

From one year ago, he had begun attempting to discover Chen Changsheng's secret, but sadly, he had not made much progress. His sole source of progress had been forced to a halt because it involved the Imperial Palace and he had been highly likely to come upon one of the Divine Empress's secrets, but nobody knew that he had continued to secretly investigate.

He had at first suspected that Chen Changsheng was Crown Prince Zhaoming. The rumor that had suddenly begun spreading through the capital last year had been deliberately started by him.

It was the secret he most wanted to know.

At the start, he only had conjectures, but he had no means of being sure because there were many points that were difficult to resolve.

If Chen Changsheng was really Crown Prince Zhaoming, why would Shang Xingzhou send him to the capital, send him right before the Empress's eyes?

The most dangerous place was the safest place?

Moreover, Chen Changsheng's age did not match up with Crown Prince Zhaoming's. On the contrary, that fellow called Yu Ren was a match.

When the false is taken for true, the true becomes false?

Everyone that met Chen Changsheng believed that he had matured early, was calm and composed and not like others his age.

When Mei Lisha was on the verge of death, he was still reading the Scroll of Time.

Many clues had been gathered and summarized at this courtyard. Countless details were gradually interweaving and taking shape within his mind.

Ultimately, all of these pointed towards a conclusion difficult to believe: Chen Changsheng was Crown Prince Zhaoming, and his age had been forcefully changed using the Scroll of Time.

This sort of conjecture was too wild, too inconceivable, and still

impossible for him to believe, so he continued to secretly investigate.

But he had investigated the secret records in the palace and turned up nothing. He had secretly imprisoned many people involved in the matter, including the midwife that had delivered the child, the imperial physician, and several elders who had long since retired to their hometowns. Only today did he finally manage to confirm that when Crown Prince Zhaoming was born, the sun wheel within his body was already ruptured.

This discovery alone was not enough to shake him. He knew that when the Divine Empress had changed her fate, she had sworn an incomparably savage oath to the starry sky, dooming her to die alone, so she would naturally not leave behind any descendant. Before the Heavenly Dao which operated behind the scenes and yet was irreversible, Crown Prince Zhaoming would naturally die.

But a few days ago, he had seen a secret message between the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and the Imperial Palace, and thus uncovered another secret.

Chen Changsheng was a member of the Imperial clan, and he was ill. The source of his illness was that when he was still in the womb, his sun wheel was already ruptured—

Just like Crown Prince Zhaoming.

Zhou Tong began to feel anxiety, even fear.

If Chen Changsheng really was Crown Prince Zhaoming, if he still lived, what did that mean?

It meant that the Divine Empress's changing of fate was not completely successful!

As long as Chen Changsheng still lived, the Divine Empress had a chance of suffering the backlash of the Heavenly Dao!

If this matter were used by those hidden opponents of hers, could the Divine Empress possibly continue to stably sit upon the imperial throne?

Zhou Tong was well aware of the miserable end that awaited him once the Empress lost power.

They were both loyal to the Empress, but he was different from Xue Xingchuan and the other Divine Generals. Those Divine Generals had their own subordinates and armies. If the Chen Imperial clan retook the imperial throne, in order to stabilize the situation, as long as those Divine Generals were willing to switch allegiances, they were guaranteed to not suffer any sort of attack. For at least the first few years, they would not encounter any sort of problem.

But nobody would permit him to live.

Everyone knew that he was the most loyal and most wild dog of the Divine Empress.

He had bitten too many people to death for the Empress, was soaked in too much blood.

He did not want to die.

Even a dog desired to live even the most degrading of lives.

How could he resolve this problem? It seemed very simple. Just like many other people thought, the Divine Empress only needed to kill Chen Changsheng.

In the eyes of the world's people, the Divine Empress was cruel to the extreme and simply did not care about these things.

However, Zhou Tong had followed the Empress for many years and knew that the tales circulating amongst the populace were not completely true.

The Empress truly had no bloodline descendant—the Princess of Ping was adopted—but how could she possibly personally smother her own child to death?

She was a woman after all. If she really did find out that Chen Changsheng was her own, what would happen if her heart went soft?

Her heart could not go soft, the Heavenly Dao could not be

disregarded, the risk could not be taken!

Zhou Tong's face grew paler and paler. His crimson official's robe faintly shook, stirring up what seemed like a wave of blood under the early autumn sun.

"Let me take on this worry for the Empress."

He silently thought in his heart.

Chapter 610 – Simply Kill Them All

"If he really is Crown Prince Zhaoming, I think that there are probably many people that want to kill him, even though they might already know that he is about to die. But you should clearly understand that their lives and even the continuation of their clans rest upon your body, so they will not take any risk, will not permit him to live a single day more."

Xu Yourong calmly concluded, "So I cannot leave the Orthodox Academy and the sword array of South Stream Temple can never be lifted."

The simple and elegant cup made of azure porcelain slowly turned under her finger just like a waterwheel pushed along by a stream, gentle, smooth, silent.

The Divine Empress gazed at the cup under her fingers, revealing a faint smile that seemed to contain a deeper meaning. But she said nothing.

The azure porcelain cup was very beautiful and seemed very tough, but to her, only a thought was needed to smash it into fine powder.

Xu Yourong had no expectations that the Divine Empress would save Chen Changsheng, even if he might be her own son.

Moreover, the Pope had no means of curing Chen Changsheng's illness, so the Empress was not guaranteed to have one.

But she hoped that in Chen Changsheng's final months, he would have a beautiful and tranquil period that could not be disturbed.

After the age of ten, Chen Changsheng had always been bearing the shadow of death as he arduously marched forward without any time to rest. Every time she thought of this matter, she would feel somewhat sad.

"If Empress agrees with my words, I will leave the capital with him tomorrow."

Xu Yourong looked at the Divine Empress and said.

The Divine Empress's smile faded, leaving behind an expression of apathy. "If he really is my son, then every day more he lives is a day that I will be concerned."

Xu Yourong replied, "On the journey back from Mount Han, I consulted all the scriptures. There is no actual proof of the backlash of the Heavenly Dao."

"That is because both Emperor Taizu and Emperor Taizong did not violate the oaths that they made. The former caused the death of all his children excepting Taizong, and the latter straightforwardly killed all those old men who have their portraits hung up in the Lingyan Pavilion. If Wang Zhice had not run off so quickly, perhaps Taizong really could have lasted for a thousand autumns and ten thousand generations, even now sitting at my position."

When she mentioned Emperors Taizu and Taizong, there was no respect in her voice. Especially when she mentioned Emperor Taizong who was admired by all, her tone seemed to even be mocking him, to regard him with no small measure of disgrace.

"Two years ago when Chen Changsheng lit up his Fated Star in the library of the Orthodox Academy, I and Mo Yu just happened to be on the Dew Platform. At the time, I noted that a Fated Star could also be the foreordained baneful star upon one's fate...if fate has foreordained that between me and him, only one of us can live, will the Heavenly Dao allow him to live or me to live?"

The Divine Empress's voice was gradually getting colder.

Xu Yourong was keenly aware that before the Heavenly Dao passed its final judgment, the Empress would move to give an answer.

The Divine Empress stood up, indicating that she no longer needed to speak. Holding her hands behind her back, she walked to the window and gazed out at the sky which seemed ablaze.

Xu Yourong also walked to the window and gazed at the splendid red of the evening sky. She narrowed her eyes, subconsciously also placing her hands behind her back.

From the back, the two had the exact same posture, like duplicates, or like a mother and daughter.

The Divine Empress commented, "It's apparent to anyone that you are much more like my daughter than the Princess of Ping."

The Princess of Ping was a daughter that she had adopted from the Tianhai clan. Their blood relationship was extremely close and their appearances were somewhat similar.

When the Divine Empress was young, she had been one of the most renowned beauties of the world. At present, Xu Yourong was publicly acknowledged to be the most beautiful young woman, but their similarly sublime beauty was not the same.

But it was just as she said: anyone would think that Xu Yourong was her own daughter.

This was because of temperament, bearing, spirit, and similar reasons.

"In truth, I have also always treated you as my own daughter because we have identical blood."

The Divine Empress gazed at a blazing cloud on the horizon, a dazzling radiance emanating from her beautiful face along with an incomparably firm self-confidence. "Back when I made the offering to the starry sky and defied the heavens to change my fate, I was perfectly willing to die without descendants so that I could ascend to the imperial throne. I have never regretted this matter because I am very well aware that even the Heavenly Dao cannot prevent the rebirth of the Phoenix."

The blazing cloud slowly moved west like a Phoenix breaking free of encircling flames.

"You are my descendant, my successor."

The Divine Empress turned to Xu Yourong and indifferently said, "As for whether or not he is my son, I simply don't care."

Xu Yourong thought, he's still your flesh and blood. Does not a single strand of affection exist in you?

"I've taught you for so many years, but it seems to me that your teacher has untaught everything."

The Divine Empress expressionlessly asserted, "Affection is the world's most cheaply bought item, virtue an excuse for the weak to protect themselves. None of them are important."

Xu Yourong asked, "Then what is the most important thing?"

The Divine Empress looked up towards the sky and leisurely said, "To exist."

After a moment of silence, Xu Yourong asked, "How should we exist?"

"How to exist? Take all that is wondrous, see how long can one

exist, how can one make the soul inextinguishable, and proceed in the direction of the Great Dao."

"All things have a beginning and an end. Even those of Concealed Divinity and those above, who have obtained Grand Liberation, have a birth and death."

"Things easily decay, but the effects they leave are everlasting. Ultimately, one must see how deep the tracks are that one has left."

The Divine Empress turned and looked at her, continuing, "And those tracks come from your and my footsteps, follow the directions of our hearts."

Xu Yourong asked, "And if someone blocks your way?"

The Divine Empress answered, "So we need the strength to kill all those who obstruct us. Only this way can we march the world forward according to our desires, to brand our souls upon history such that even the reprimands of tens of thousands of people after we depart cannot wipe it away. Only this way can we get close to true eternity."

Xu Yourong was somewhat confused. Wrinkling her brow, she asked, "What if everyone opposes you? How is it possible to kill them all?"

"Of course you can kill them all. This is a very simple task."

The Divine Empress's voice resounded through the vast and empty palace hall.

"First kill everyone over there."

She gazed towards the distant north as if speaking towards those snowstorms that never ceased throughout the year.

"Then you kill everyone over there."

She gazed towards the distant west as if making a proclamation towards the boundless ocean.

"After that, kill everyone there."

She drew back her gaze towards a certain place in the capital.

With her words, the trees lining the Divine Avenue of the Li Palace suddenly began to move without wind, countless leaves rustling to the ground.

"Finally, kill everyone over there."

She gazed to the sky, her eyes deep as if she wanted to see through the blazing sky.

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Twilight gradually retreated and darkness fell. The restaurants outside the Orthodox Academy remained closed, leaving Hundred Flowers Lane very quiet. There was only the occasional call of those peddlers, but having been warned by the Orthodoxy cavalry, they knew that the Holy Maiden and disciples of South Stream Temple were all living in the Orthodox Academy, so their calls were very controlled and not very loud.

An old man selling gardenias borrowed the cover of night to draw close to the Orthodox Academy's walls. It looked like he planned to relieve himself when he suddenly vanished.

The carriage delivering ingredients from Clear Lake Restaurant entered the Orthodox Academy through the rear gate. The unusually large amount of night snacks was carefully carried by the chefs into the kitchen to be prepared for the students of the Orthodox Academy and disciples of South Stream Temple. One of the middle-aged men that had delivered the food chatted with a chef and then disappeared in front of the gray walls outside.

Similar scenes occurred in many other places, yet nobody noticed.

In total, fourteen people infiltrated the Orthodox Academy in the darkness, all of them assassins or killers.

Other than the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and Black Robe, in

the entire continent, only the Department for Purging Officials could find so many powerful assassins and killers in such a short time.

No matter how high the cultivation levels of the South Stream Temple disciples, how powerful their swordplay, or how formidable the sword array they had laid down, they were still disciples of the Dao who quietly cultivated on their mountain peak and so were far too lacking in experience on this aspect. Moreover, there were more than ten points of entry along the Orthodox Academy's outer wall. No matter how tight the patrols of the Orthodoxy cavalry, it was impossible for them to have complete control.

Not everyone in the Orthodox Academy was unaware of these assassins infiltrating the Orthodox Academy.

When that old man selling gardenias arrived at the Orthodox Academy's perimeter wall, Zhexiu opened his eyes.

He was not in the house, but in the great banyan tree standing by the lake.

During the day, Chen Changsheng had communicated his last will and had also spoken of many other things.

Tang Thirty-Six and Su Moyu were very quiet while Xuanyuan Po had run off. Zhexiu said nothing, simply climbed up the tree, and fell asleep with the Demon Commander's Banner Sword in his embrace.

Behind him was the sword array of the South Stream Temple, and further behind that was the house. Chen Changsheng was inside.

In order to kill Chen Changsheng, they first had to get through him.

In the Proclamation of Azure Sky, he was ranked second, the sole young genius able to threaten Xu Yourong's position. It was not because of how high his cultivation level was, but because his fighting strength was incredibly formidable.

His cultivation level was not the highest in the Orthodox Academy either, but if magical artifacts and other items were not counted, even Chen Changsheng was not his match.

He had grown up in the desolate yet treacherous snowy plains, a wolf club that had lived after confronting death.

Last autumn in front of the gate of the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng had used one strike to break through a Star Domain, shocking the entire crowd. At the time, he had said that there were at least five people that could perform a similar feat, to defeat a Star Condensation cultivator while being in Ethereal Opening.

The five people he spoke of were Qiushan Jun, Xu Yourong, Gou Hanshi, himself, and Zhexiu. (TN: This seems to be retconned, as the original list did not contain Zhexiu or Chen Changsheng, instead including Nanke and Xu Yourong twice under her

pseudonym of Chujian.)

Zhexiu was extremely sensitive to danger. He impassively stared into the darkness of the Orthodox Academy. It didn't take too long before he discovered the tracks of at least seven assassins.

However, something very strange occurred soon after, because those assassins began collapsing one by one. Some collapsed in the weeds, some collapsed in the forest, and one assassin attempted to escape into the water, but sank down and never floated back up. Under the starlight, only a few dull patches of red could be seen in the lake.

Only then did Zhexiu realize that so many experts were actually concealed in the Orthodox Academy. Although those experts were clearly friends and not enemies, this fact still made a chill run through his body.

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A carriage stood outside Hundred Flowers Lane.

The lantern light in the carriage compartment was very dusky, somewhat yellowing the white paper on the table and turning the letters on the paper somewhat blue.

The complexions of the two officials of the Department for

Purging Officials grew paler and paler.

It was without question that ever since the Divine Empress came to power, the government office within the alley of the Northern Military Department was the most sinister place in the continent and had always acted the most wantonly.

But the person the Department for Purging Officials wished to kill tonight was not an ordinary person but the future Pope. Upon thinking of this fact, the two officials still felt incredibly nervous and afraid.

Of the assassins that had infiltrated the Orthodox Academy, not one had returned.

Even more frightening was that no sound had come from the Orthodox Academy. It did not seem like a battle was occurring within.

The darkness enveloping the Orthodox Academy was like an abyss, silently swallowing the lives of the Department for Purging Officials' fourteen most outstanding assassins.

Chapter 611 – The Meaning Of 'I Want To Leave' (I)

Time incessantly marched forward, and the faces of the two officials of the Department for Purging Officials within the carriage continued to pale. They ceased waiting and departed from Hundred Flowers Lane.

The starlight illuminated Zhou Prison, illuminated the crabapple tree, illuminated the great crimson robe upon Zhou Tong's body. Like the Netherworld, like a fairyland, like a sea of blood.

Upon hearing his subordinate's report, his face did not change, just like that of a corpse.

Within the Orthodox Academy was the sword array of South Stream Temple, and outside was the Orthodoxy cavalry. The Li Palace had not seemed to do anything, but in reality, it had long since made preparations—Mao Qiuyu had always been in that inn within Hundred Flowers Lane. [His two sleeves swayed in the breeze](#), yet he had a divine artifact on his person. The Orthodox Academy itself held eighteen cardinals, and the darkness still concealed a few experts that Mei Lisha had left behind.

(TN: Two sleeves swaying in the breeze can also mean 'uncorrupted' and 'clean-handed')

Zhou Tong had used the lives of fourteen elite assassins to confirm these facts.

Against this array of forces, even if the Divine Empress really did move the Imperial Guard, she was not guaranteed to kill Chen

Changsheng, unless she personally stepped out herself. And she would have to finish the deed in the shortest possible time, or else the Pope was certain to appear. He had never held any hope of killing Chen Changsheng tonight. He only wanted to probe and then conclude that it was no good and that he was required to find another way.

In a manor located in the suburbs of the capital, several people were also discussing the same matter.

"It's no good, it's far too difficult to attack the Orthodox Academy in a way that won't attract attention."

"The clan has spent so much money in the past few years. Did we feed it all to dogs?"

"If it was anything else, we could probably do it, but this matter is no trivial concern."

"The first thing you should tell me is just how many people we have in the Orthodox Academy."

"We really do have agents within the Orthodox Academy, and also within the Orthodoxy cavalry. We even have friends within the Li Palace willing to assist us. But Xu Yourong's response was simple yet effective. As long as the South Stream Temple sword array exists, it is impossible for us to approach that house."

"I just don't believe it. There's no way that a sword array formed

by those girls can stop us."

Seeing the excited expression on this nephew of his, Tianhai Chenwu slightly creased his brow then raised his hand to halt the arguments in the hall. He asked, "Is your surname Zhou, Wang, or Su?"

Zhou was Zhou Dufu, Wang was Wang Zhice, Su was Su Li.

In the past one thousand years, only these three people had ever invaded Holy Maiden Peak and broken through the sword array of South Stream Temple, and even they had consumed a massive amount of time and an enormous amount of strength.

In the Tianhai clan, just who could compare to these three legends? And who had the confidence to break through the sword array of South Stream Temple, enter the house, and kill Chen Changsheng before the divine presence of the Pope?

Upon hearing this question, the nephew was struck speechless, his entire face red as he lowered his head.

Tianhai Chenwu glanced at his son, who had never spoken once, then he declared indifferently to his clansmen, "The Holy Maiden is intelligent, her deductive abilities unrivaled. It is impossible for her to leave behind a single gap."

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"The Orthodoxy will naturally protect Chen Changsheng, and seeing that the Holy Maiden is also willing to protect Chen Changsheng, the Divine Empress might have some scruples and at least will not personally act. Thus, Chen Changsheng is safe, but she forgot one matter, and that is that Chen Changsheng is not a corpse."

Zhou Tong impassively gazed at his subordinates and concluded, "Since he is not a corpse, he will assuredly have his own way of thinking. If he wants to leave the Orthodox Academy on his own, who can obstruct him?"

His subordinates did not completely understand, asking, "Why would he want to leave?"

Zhou Tong stood in front of the courtyard, gazing at the crabapple tree, not responding to the question.

He had seen the message between the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and the Imperial Palace.

In the message, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets said that Chen Changsheng would soon die.

He knew that a person like Chen Changsheng would never just quietly die like this.

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The wine cup fell against the hard pearwood table, giving off a dull yet somewhat crisp sound. Tianhai Shengxue, who had returned from Snowhold Pass to the capital not too long ago, mocked those cousins of his in the hall. His gaze finally rested on his father as he spoke, "We can only wait until he walks out of the Orthodox Academy himself."

Tianhai Chenwu's expression grew gentler and somewhat appreciative, but in the next moment, this appreciation vanished with the night wind. His expression turned solemn once more and his voice turned cold.

"He will come out, and as long as he takes just one step out of the Orthodox Academy, just kill him."

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The darkness was as before, still peaceful and serene, those collapsed figures just an illusion as if many assassins had not come and then been killed one by one.

Zhexiu quietly gazed at the lakeshore. Upon confirming that those assassins had all been killed, he still did not relax. He was

still somewhat concerned and so slid down from the banyan tree and headed towards the house.

Countless inert sword intents lay concealed, inwardly coinciding with the principles of the world and interweaving around the house. If someone without permission were to intrude, they would assuredly arouse countless terrifying sword glows.

Zhexiu turned a blind eye to this and walked on through.

Those sword intents still remained in the darkness, not activating and chopping towards his body. The South Stream Temple disciples were keenly aware of his relationship with Chen Changsheng. The Holy Maiden had been invited into the Imperial Palace and it was truly impossible for the rest of them to make a decision in such a short time.

No plan in the world was truly without flaw. No matter how incredible Xu Yourong's skills in deduction were or that the starry sky itself was carved upon her Fated Star Plate, there were still some things that she could not calculate, like the minds of others.

Just like that, Zhexiu crossed through South Stream Temple's sword array and walked into the house.

Then, he saw Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six was very worried about Chen Changsheng, so it was only right that he appear here. It was very obvious that the

arrangements Xu Yourong had left behind were of no use against him.

"What is he doing?" Zhexiu asked Tang Thirty-Six.

Only half a day had gone by, but Tang Thirty-Six was clearly exhausted.

The fact that Chen Changsheng was on the verge of death had placed a massive psychological pressure on everybody. As Chen Changsheng's best friend, his mood had been even more greatly affected.

Tang Thirty-Six did not respond to Zhexiu's question. He only gazed at the tightly shut door, a rather gloomy expression on his face.

Zhexiu spoke no more, walking straight over and pushing open the door.

There was nobody in the room.

Seeing the vacant bed and the unoccupied desk, his and Tang Thirty-Six's complexions instantly changed.

After a while, the just-informed Su Moyu quickly hurried over.

"What do we do?"

Su Moyu's expression was very concerned. "We have to quickly inform the Li Palace."

After a moment of silence, Zhexiu answered, "Don't."

"There's a sort of massive beast that, upon learning that it will soon die, will travel to some place very far away to quietly await the final moment, unwilling to let anyone see it. Perhaps it feels that only this way can it preserve its final bit of dignity."

Tang Thirty-Six concluded, "Chen Changsheng is probably thinking along these lines."

Zhexiu commented, "When cats are about to die, they'll do something similar."

The blankets on the bed were folded neatly into a square, looking just like a piece of tofu. The desk and bookshelves were free of dust as if they been bought today. When he left, Chen Changsheng seemed to not bring anything with him, including the old books and water-damaged bamboo dragonfly on the bookshelf. However, Xuanyuan Po was not here, or else he might have discovered that a kitchen knife used for slicing bones was missing from the Orthodox Academy's kitchen.

In addition, when Ye Xiaolian entered the library to rest, she realized that a small box was sitting by her bedding. Upon opening the box, she saw a letter. The name on it was Chen Changsheng's and he said that it was meant for Xu Yourong.

An hour before all this occurred, at midnight, Chen Changsheng jumped from the window of the library, passed through the dense forest, and reached the kitchen on the other side of the lake. Taking a kitchen knife, he then opened the Yellow Paper Umbrella, jumped over the newly built section of the wall, and left the Orthodox Academy.

The South Stream Temple disciples realized that the target of their protection had vanished. It did not take too long for this news to reach the mansion in the suburbs of the capital and the courtyard in the alley of the Northern Military Department.

Early autumn crabapple trees naturally had no flowers to blossom, and it was still too early for leaves to fall, so its dense foliage gently rustled in the night wind. The starlight fell upon the crimson official's robe and then reflected to below the crabapple tree. The leaves gently rising up and down were plated with a blood-red luster, transforming into a sea of blood.

"I don't like any sort of variable that is beyond my control, and I hope that all of you can remove this variable as soon as possible. In other words, all of you have only one night to find him."

Zhou Tong stood on the steps, gazing expressionlessly at the dense mass of kneeling officials in the courtyard. "Afterwards, I don't care what method you use, but you must kill him."

The officials in the courtyard silently dispersed like a tide, leaving behind only a solitary crabapple tree and two officials

dressed in crimson official's gowns.

There were very few officials who were qualified to stand on the same level as Zhou Tong, and Cheng Jun was one of them. As a powerful minister similarly deeply trusted by the Divine Empress, in the so-called Eight Tigers discussed amongst the populace, he was only beneath Zhou Tong.

"To invade the Orthodox Academy in the middle of the night to assassinate someone is one thing. He's left the Orthodox Academy, and if we still want to kill him in the capital, that would be an open killing...the Pope will not let us go."

Cheng Jun was a high official of the Grand Court of Revision, yet he had none of the dignity of someone charged with maintaining the laws of the Great Zhou. His face was like an inverted triangle, his nose drooped and his lips were thin. Merely based on his face, he was an extremely loathsome person.

The officials that the Divine Empress used at the very beginning were all those who had been excluded from the bureaucracy, the once-disappointed. This was because, at the very beginning, those officials who truly possessed integrity and talent were not willing to vow their loyalty to her.

"Besides the Empress, who in the world would be willing to let us go?"

A faint smile hung over Zhou Tong's face. Under the starlight, his face seemed even paler. He did not seem like a living person and

his smile was all the more strange and terrifying.

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When news that Chen Changsheng had left the Orthodox Academy arrived at this mansion, the Tianhai clan's discussions hurriedly concluded as they all speedily dispersed. With this dispersal, the will of the clan was spread to the entire capital. From the Imperial Guard to the mansions of the capital, countless people plunged into the darkness in an attempt to find Chen Changsheng and then kill him.

Tianhai Chenwu walked under an autumn tree and gazed at an extremely distant ball of light, not speaking for a very long time—that place was the Dew Platform, the place where the Empress most enjoyed spending time.

Gazing at his father's back, Tianhai Shengxue was also quiet. He felt that there was something off about today. Killing Chen Changsheng was naturally not a very difficult task, but it should not have made the entire Tianhai clan suddenly stir to life like a hurricane, because this array of forces was too great, because they would not necessarily find Chen Changsheng. On the contrary, this would only put the other side on their guard, even giving them a sort of notification, but why?

Chapter 612 – The Meaning Of 'I Want To Leave' (II)

"It will naturally be best if we can kill him, but what do we do if we don't kill him? And don't forget that even now, the palace has not made the slightest noise. Perhaps...the Empress is also hesitating."

Tianhai Chenwu gazed in the direction of the distant Dew Platform, his face showing exhaustion and disappointment. For the imperial throne, he had plotted and prepared for ten-odd years, yet it was apparent that the path forward was still shrouded in darkness. Perhaps it would be very painful, but he had to begin considering other paths.

"Is Father not concerned about matters of the future?" Tianhai Shengxue asked.

In these past few years, the Tianhai clan had experienced limitless prosperity. The Tang clan, the Qiushan clan, the Zhu clan, the Luofeng clan, and even the Chen Imperial clan, these ancient clans with vast resources, had all been firmly suppressed by the Tianhai clan. If one were to say that these clans and those officials who were still inwardly loyal to the Imperial clan had no complaints about the Tianhai clan, nobody would believe it. If the Tianhai clan could not ascend to the imperial throne of the Great Zhou, when their walls began to totter and everyone was about to give it a shove, who would show mercy to them?

"He is Aunt's son; in his body flows the blood of my Tianhai clan. In the future, even if he ascends to become emperor, would he

possibly exterminate his mother's family? No, no matter if behind him stands Shang Xingzhou or the Pope, he will always feel timid and uneasy and will ultimately still rely on our strength." Tianhai Chenwu gazed at the distant Dew Platform, his short beard drifting lightly in the night breeze, giving off a refined and unyielding aura. "We are not Zhou Tong, the people will not come shouting and attacking the moment our fortunes are down. So we must act more cautiously."

Tianhai Shengxue understood his father's meaning, but...if that rumor was true, if Chen Changsheng really was Crown Prince Zhaoming, then he was a threat to the Divine Empress. Was this moment really the time to consider matters of the future? He suddenly felt like the wind blowing through the garden had chilled, and then he remembered that it was already the bleak autumn season.

The Tianhai clan's present status naturally had some relationship to the Divine Empress, but just as the Tang Old Master would often say while fishing at the side of the Wen River, the Tianhai clan and the Tianhai Divine Empress had never been one thing. The Tianhai clan held influence at every level of society, so even if they lost the care of the Divine Empress, no power could pull them up by the roots in a single day.

A truly far-sighted and deep-thinking sage would never place the future of a clan entirely on one person, even if that person was the strongest person in the world. The Zhu clan of Tianliang County had flourished because of Zhu Luo and now it was withering before the world's eyes because this expert's era was coming to an end. This was a lesson and warning to all other clans.

Moreover, even the most formidable figure eventually returned to the sea of stars. Emperor Taizong had died, Zhou Dufu had died—who could escape the forces of life and death?

Countless people emerged from the Tianhai clan's mansion and the government offices controlled by the Tianhai clan and charged into the darkness, beginning to search for Chen Changsheng's whereabouts. This very naturally shocked many people. Those people then noticed the suspicious movements coming from the sinister office in the principal alley of the Northern Military Department, and only then did they learn from the Orthodox Academy the source of this uproar: Chen Changsheng had left the Orthodox Academy and vanished to parts unknown.

The bell of the Li Palace rang out in warning and the priests dispersed into the darkness. The lights of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education were also lit, the plum blossoms within glowing with a bewitching beauty under their light. Two-hundred-some Orthodoxy cavalry charged out from the Bureau, galloping towards the Orthodox Academy with thunderous hooves.

On this early autumn night, the situation in the capital instantly grew tense. It was extremely somber and desolate, yellow leaves falling and withering.

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The best way to die was a question normal people did not wish to

consider. Every time they considered it, they would subconsciously back away. Chen Changsheng's life was different from normal, so he had considered this question before. He had thought about it many times, so he had an extremely clear answer, or position, towards this question.

'To live an exciting life and then die alone' was the answer Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six had guessed, but it was not his answer. Perhaps at the moment he left the world, he would choose some lonely place, but in the time beforehand, he would not live in solitude, lowering his head to lick his wounds in silence. He had not left to search for his own tomb, but to perform some tasks.

Zhexiu's words had reminded him that this world truly was brimming with evil intentions aimed at him, but while living in this world, many people had shown him great kindness. Before he left this world, he had to repay this kindness, repay those evil intentions. These were tasks that he had to accomplish.

On this quiet and beautiful autumn night, the big and small streets of the capital were filled with the spies of various factions while the cavalry of both the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy galloped up and down the boulevards. Countless people were seeking him so that they could attempt to kill or protect him. Yet at this time, he had already escaped everyone's gaze. Holding the Yellow Paper Umbrella, he had noiselessly arrived at New North Bridge and then jumped into that dried-up well.

The space at the bottom of the well was still pitch-black and ice-cold. His still-injured body fell into the seemingly bottomless abyss faster and faster, as if he was transforming into a rock descending

from the heavens to bring the rest of the world with it in destruction, yet when he was several dozen zhang away from the ground, a thick Qi like a soft cotton cushion appeared on his body, greatly decreasing his speed of descent.

This sort of situation had happened many times and he was not the slightest bit panicked. Correcting his posture, he waited for that Qi to scatter and for his two feet to firmly plant themselves on the ice-covered ground.

A point of light appeared on the roof of this cavern, a Night Pearl. Countless Night Pearls followed it in lighting up as if the profuse stars had descended to this place. A mountainous black figure floated over, seemingly slowly but actually swiftly, from the distance, regarding him from high above.

Under the silver light, the Black Dragon's eyes that were larger than houses were suffused with a cold light, brimming with a ruthless sensation, yet it also gave off a particularly apathetic feeling.

This sort of meeting had already occurred many times, but today was different. Neither Chen Changsheng nor the Black Dragon spoke. They gazed silently at each other in the chilly wind, the atmosphere somewhat oppressive.

After a long time, a dragon cry of anger echoed through the cavern, causing the light spilling down from the Night Pearls to tremble. The snow that covered the ground year-round madly danced in the air, swatting at Chen Changsheng's body and leaving deep and shallow marks like the lashes of a whip.

Chen Changsheng could not understand her mood, so he silently endured it.

The dragon cry gradually faded and the snow and wind gradually settled. The Black Dragon gazed down upon him, no more apathy in its eyes, only ruthlessness and anger, and also a tinge of... frustration.

"You...you...you're going to die?"

As the dragon cry vanished, it was replaced by the voice of a young human girl. One could hear that she was currently very bewildered.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the Black Dragon. He felt that this Black Dragon with such a massive body and such terrifying cultivation actually had a voice that was pure and tender. The contrast was truly too great.

"Yes."

The Black Dragon once more grew furious. Ten-odd li away, her tail struck against the wall, yet before it could land, it was sent flying away by the array implanted in the wall, throwing frost and ice everywhere.

"But...but..."

The Black Dragon gazed at Chen Changsheng, her eyes tinged with anguish. Perhaps because of the array's backlash or because she had seen Chen Changsheng's tragic features, her voice trembled.

"...you still haven't learned Dragon language."

"I'm sorry." Chen Changsheng lowered his head and only after a while did he raise it again. Looking at her, he said, "I might not be able to learn Dragon language for the rest of my life."

"Then...then...you are forbidden from dying."

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

The Black Dragon sadly said, "You haven't done what you promised, so how can you die?"

"I'm sorry." Chen Changsheng once more apologized, saying, "I once promised you that I would find a way to rescue you from here..."

"Yes, yes!" The Black Dragon's eyes suddenly brightened as it continued, "You still haven't rescued me from here, so how can you die? I cannot permit you to just die like this."

"Don't worry, I've already thought of a method to rescue you."

Chen Changsheng laughed, very happily and sincerely. "On the journey back from Mount Han, I had a lot of time to think and calculate. I've confirmed that we still have to start with the Scroll of Time. In a moment, I'm going to go over to the stone wall and perfect the array to ensure that the Daoist techniques of the Scroll of Time will continue to function for a very long time. But if we're relying solely on the array, it might take a very long time for the power of time to completely eliminate the restriction, so I advise you to begin practicing the Scroll of Time. You might be able to speed up the process by quite a lot."

He suddenly remembered something and said, "Right, in Mount Han, I met with Wang Zhice, but because things were too hurried at the time, I forgot to ask him a few things."

Upon hearing that name, the Black Dragon that was still immersed in the sorrow and anger of Chen Changsheng's coming death could not help but freeze. It asked in a strange tone, "That swindler is still alive?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Although he didn't admit his identity, that should be the case."

The Black Dragon's voice turned cold, filled with bitter resentment. "It truly is the case that evil people live forever."

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say. If he viewed things from the Black Dragon's standpoint, she had just been a confused and ignorant little girl of the Dragon race at the time. Although she had committed many crimes after coming ashore from the South Sea, being imprisoned for several hundred years was enough to pay

for her crimes; what need was there to keep her eternally imprisoned in this underground cavern where the sun never shone? But if one examined the matter through Wang Zhice's standpoint, as a military advisor and protector of the Great Zhou Dynasty, he naturally had the responsibility of protecting the common people of the Great Zhou.

"Chen Changsheng..." The Black Dragon's voice suddenly grew calm.

"Hm?" He was somewhat puzzled.

The Black Dragon's voice echoed incessantly, the cold carrying a faint sorrow.

"...you should not have been a good person."

"...why?"

"Because good people do not live long."

Chen Changsheng once more lowered his head towards the frost at his feet. As he recollected that path shrouded in storms and snow that he had walked in these past few years, he fell silent for a very long time.

He had always believed that a person like Wang Po was a good person and that he most certainly was not. He had only acted according to his heart's desire because he cultivated the Dao of

following his heart.

It was a pity that life and death followed the dictates of the heavens and would not listen to his heart.

He raised his head towards the Black Dragon, wanting to give a few words of explanation, but realized that the Black Dragon had disappeared!

That body like a mountain range had just vanished like that!

Chen Changsheng was abnormally shocked. He looked all around, wanting to clear up just what had happened.

Then, he saw that a girl had appeared on the snow-covered ground.

This girl was wearing a black dress. She sat in the snow, her dress spread out around her, two thin chains extending from beneath her dress towards the stone wall ten-odd li away.

Chapter 613 – The Reason For Eating You

The girl's appearance was like a painting, her beauty peerless, a newly-bloomed black lotus. Yet her eyes were apathetic, their depths holding cruelty. Paired with those pitch-black vertical pupils, her beauty was particularly strange.

Chen Changsheng could not speak for a very long time—at this point, he had naturally guessed at the identity of this black-clothed girl, especially after seeing that line of blood on her forehead like a bead of cinnabar.

He knew that with the lifespan of the Dragon race, she was just a little girl.

He had once heard Xu Yourong say that she was a little girl.

But he still did not expect that she really would be a little girl.

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After what seemed like a very long time, Chen Changsheng finally stirred from his shock.

He began walking over to her. His actions were somewhat slow because he was rather nervous.

The little girl raised her head to glance at him, seeming somewhat impatient and utterly majestic.

Chen Changsheng saw the apathy and cruelty in her eyes and felt like he was being looked down on from up high. He felt somewhat uncomfortable, but he knew that this was just her nature, not because she felt a deep disdain for him.

It was the instinctual looking down that higher level beings had for lower level beings.

Just like when humans looked at oxen or horses in the field. Perhaps there would be fondness, sympathy, respect, but those would all be granted from up high. This was a matter that was impossible to change.

As Chen Changsheng walked up to her, she slightly lowered her head, seemingly not desiring him to get a clear look at her face, or perhaps because she wanted to conceal the feigned indifference that was a result of uneasiness in her heart. Yet she did not know that to human males, a lowered head was most liable to fill their heads with impressions of tenderness and shyness.

"I didn't know...you...could do this."

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say. He clearly understood why she was willing to take human form to meet with him. Because as he was going to die, she wanted to show something to him. He wasn't clear on what she wanted to show, but he had a

vague guess and so naturally found it hard to not be nervous.

"I will not permit you to die." The little girl raised her head and looked at Chen Changsheng.

She had already restored her composure and indifference. She was clearly sitting on the floor and much shorter than Chen Changsheng, but her gaze seemed to be looking down at him, her tone of voice like that of an order or command.

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, it's not like I want to die. He soon after remembered that earlier in the day, before Yourong left for the Imperial Palace, she had said something similar.

"I said just now that the Scroll of Time should be able to help you break through the restriction and leave. Ever since last year, Yourong and I have been constantly discussing the question of how to rescue you. This time on our journey, she also proposed many ideas. The array I will be laying down in a little while is actually a design drawn by her."

For some reason, Chen Changsheng looked at her and seriously said these words because his vague guess made him not want her to have any sort of complaint against Yourong in the future.

The little girl twisted her head away, not willing to say a word.

She had not expected that Xu Yourong would help her, so she was

somewhat shocked, but it was just that and nothing more.

Chen Changsheng said, "I thought that you would at least say 'thank you' to her."

"She's with you every day, but now it turns out that you're going to die, and you feel I should thank her?"

The girl's voice suddenly sharpened, thorny with rage.

Chen Changsheng didn't know how to respond.

Although logically speaking, they had already met many times and were already very familiar with each other, this was the first time he had met her in the form of a little girl, so it was difficult to avoid a somewhat strange and awkward feeling.

"This...Lady Zhizhi."

"I said before that I'm not called Zhizhi!"

The girl glared at him and said, "I have a name."

Chen Changsheng recalled that Xu Yourong had once told him that the little Black Dragon did have a name back then. It seemed to be Zhusha, but before he could open his mouth...

"I am called Hongzhuang," the little girl said impassively to him.

Chen Changsheng would naturally not argue with her over such a trifling matter. He said, "I'm going to lay down the array. Do you want to come with me to see?"

From last autumn to this summer, he had come here many times and researched the array on the stone wall, contemplating how to break it and let the Black Dragon go free. He had never let her come watch before.

It wasn't because there was some secret behind his methods to break the array, but because she had no interest, or perhaps because she had no confidence that Chen Changsheng had the ability to break through the restriction laid down by Wang Zhice.

But today, he had invited her to come and see because there might not be an opportunity in the future.

The little Black Dragon thought it over and then stood up, turned, and began walking towards the stone wall in the distance. Out of convenience, she naturally raised up her black dress, thus revealing her two bare feet.

Her bare feet were white and pure as snow. When her feet pressed against the frost-covered ground, the ice seemed to instantly lose some of its glamour.

Two thin metal chains were tied to her ankles. The chains were

pitch-black, their surfaces rusted. The snow-white ankles juxtaposed against these chains made them all the more distinctive.

Several hundred years had passed and she did not even know how many times she had attempted to break through. The chains dug deeply into her ankles. One could clearly see wounds and even white bone.

One could feel the pain just looking at this scene, let alone what the girl was feeling. Chen Changsheng walked in front of her, holding the chains in his hands. Carefully and prudently, he ensured that the chains would not rub against her ankles.

Although her power was shackled down by the array, she still preserved much of the Dragon race's innate strength and was able to travel freely through the underground cavern. Chen Changsheng's speed was also rather astonishing. Logically speaking, they should have been able to traverse the ten-odd li very quickly, but for some reason, they walked very slowly.

The night sky of stars that was the collection of Night Pearls embedded on the roof began to go out, leaving only the distant stone wall with some remaining rays of light. She carried her dress, he carried the chains, and just like that, they vanished into the darkness.

The dusky light fell upon the stone wall, casting the faces of those two legendary Divine Generals into gloom. The chains in their hands seemed to be covered in the poison of the Shaman tribe, a chilling sight.

Chen Changsheng stood in front of the wall, examining these two generals and the array that was once concealed within the stone wall. After calculating and contemplating for a while, he removed some items he had long since prepared from his sheath and began to lay down an array.

As time slowly passed, he worked with extreme focus. His brow would occasionally crease, but only he knew whether it was because he had encountered some difficulty or because of the pain caused by his injuries acting up.

The little Black Dragon habitually sat herself down on the ice-covered ground and raised her head to gaze at those images on the stone wall. She was somewhat in a trance as she thought about something, regret and frustration faintly visible in her apathetic eyes. Only when she gazed at Chen Changsheng did those negative emotions gradually dull.

After what seemed like a long time, Chen Changsheng finally finished laying down the array. He carefully looked it over twice to ensure there were no flaws or problems before finally taking a sigh of relief. Ever since that night two years ago when he had reached this place through the Imperial Palace, he had researched these chains that imprisoned the Black Dragon for a very long time. It could be said that he put all the Daoist techniques and knowledge he had learned throughout his entire life into this effort, and having been greatly assisted by Xu Yourong for more than half a year, he was absolutely confident that it would be effective.

He took the Scroll of Time and placed it in the Black Dragon's

hand. Then, looking at her expression, seriously said to her, "Do you have any method of temporarily falling unconscious?"

The little Black Dragon's eyes went round as she thought, what sort of request is this?

Chen Changsheng had originally planned to say something more, but upon seeing the look on her face, he knew that she would not agree, so he could only say, "No matter what happens in a little while, it's best if you can endure."

The little Black Dragon suddenly felt that something was wrong and extended a hand to knock him down, but she was too late.

Noiselessly, like the leaf of a willow tree cutting apart a breeze of the early spring.

The incomparably sharp Stainless Sword emerged from the sheath and descended.

Chen Changsheng made a small cut on his wrist and blood rushed out.

There was clearly something wrong with his blood. It was suffused with a light golden sheen as if it contained a boundless energy. It was sacred and pure beyond compare, yet it also gave off an aura of extremely bewitching beauty.

His blood of Sacred Light also contained Xu Yourong's true blood

of the Heavenly Phoenix.

As he cut upon the wound and his blood encountered the cold wind of the cavern, an indescribable scent spread throughout the cavern with an incomprehensible speed.

This scent was very much like the scent of grass, or the dew upon the grass, or the fragrance of newly born fruit, or fruit that had just ripened and been blown about by the wind for an entire night.

If this situation were allowed to continue, this scent would spread out from New North Bridge to the rest of the capital, and then the entire populace of the capital might go mad, and even the birds of the Mausoleum of Books would madly fly towards this place.

Fortunately, or perhaps long since prepared for by Chen Changsheng, the array he had just laid down also contained some of the power of the Tong Bow that Xu Yourong used in Mount Han to cut off the scent of his blood from the world. Using the Sacred Light within his blood as the foundation, it could effectively eliminate his blood's scent. Put together with the extreme cold naturally emanated by the Black Dragon, it could be guaranteed that the scent would naturally dull before spreading beyond New North Bridge.

But there was a problem.

The little Black Dragon was right next to him, right within the area enclosed by the array. She had always been watching him

work, so she naturally smelled that scent.

Clank!

The chains were drawn taut as her body floated into the air. Her black hair madly danced around, as did her black dress. Her beautiful face was impassive and inhuman like a god or devil.

Countless emotions poured out from her bewitching vertical pupils, complex to the extreme and conflicted to the extreme. It was the natural intimacy a higher being had for a supreme sacred energy, and also the infinite desire an expert had for true eternity, and also that instinctual craving of all living beings.

She gazed down at Chen Changsheng from above, avaricious yet uneasy, craving yet sorrowful. She constantly struggled until finally, she calmed down.

Calm did not represent safety.

Although she was a noble and powerful Black Frost Dragon, she was still very young. Furthermore, she had come ashore from the South Sea when she was only a child, never receiving the complete education of the Dragon race. As a consequence, she had never learned how to control her desires, how to prevent her mind and will from being controlled by this sort of desire.

Her expression was very calm, her eyes very ruthless.

She decided to eat Chen Changsheng because he was far too tasty. And she had more than enough reason to eat Chen Changsheng. Even if the starry sky descended and the will of the Heavenly Dao came to ask her, she would not feel the slightest bit ashamed.

"You heartless thing, I even gave you my first blood and you still play around with other women! In order to carry out that oath we made at the very beginning, I will swallow you alive in one bite!"

After saying this, her Qi rose up with terrifying speed, instantly breaking through several levels until it reached the Divine Domain. Then, she dived towards the ground at Chen Changsheng.

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Chapter 614 – Breathing

Blood flowed down from Chen Changsheng's wrist and fell upon the chains, splashing as it began to flow through the carved lines, seeping deep into the chains. The blood that remained on the surface of the chains evaporated in the wind and blazed into blue flames that spurted boundless heat and light in all directions.

This was the formidable power of Phoenix blood.

Those lines carved into the chains and the wall began to exude rays of light as the array slowly began to activate. A Qi that was difficult to describe, like spring leaves or autumn fruits, appeared in the cavern.

This Qi contained the divine strength of time.

At this time, the little Black Dragon had already arrived on the ground, her black hair madly flying around her, her beautiful face brimming with fiendish intent. In her similarly madly flying black clothes, one could faintly see bits of ice like diamonds spilling down!

This was a sign that she had already brought her Qi to the peak.

The present her was already standing in the Divine Domain. Let alone Chen Changsheng, even a powerful Divine General like Xue Xingchuan was not necessarily a match for her when fighting on his own.

At this time, all of Chen Changsheng's mind and attention were on the slender chains. It was like he had forgotten all other things around him and also forgotten the fatal attraction of his blood... but previously when the little Black Dragon had spoken of first blood, of oaths, and of women, his left hand had trembled for a moment. This indicated that he had truthfully been clear-headed this entire time. How could he forget the curse laid upon his fate by the Heavenly Dao, how could he forget the repeated warnings Senior Yu Ren had given to him after that night in the temple?

He had naturally already prepared a plan to deal with a possibly deranged Black Dragon.

Two extremely heavy thumps vibrated through the stone wall. It was like someone was deep within the wall, beating on a war drum, or like two distant rolls of thunder in the extremely distant night sky!

On the wall, the hands of those two legends holding the metal chains suddenly exploded with a fierce white light. Ultimately, this light transformed into two nearly solid spheres of white light about the size of a chicken egg. These two balls of light speedily traveled across the metal chains, instantly arriving at those two snow-white ankles.

No one could be faster than those two balls of white light. Even if the swiftest Xu Yourong and Nanke were here, they would also be unable to evade. The little Black Dragon who had stepped once more into the Divine Domain and had limitless strength could spend the day in the South Sea and stay the night at the Great

Western Continent, yet she still could not be faster than those two balls of light.

These two balls of light were as fast as lightning.

Because they had always been lightning.

Crack! Crack!

Two extremely clear sounds exploded through the quiet underground cavern.

The little Black Dragon paused in the air in front of Chen Changsheng, her black hair and black dress covered in the blazing white lightning, and the fiendish intent on her beautiful face vanished without a trace.

The two slender chains on her ankles rapidly vibrated, clinking and rattling intensely. They were slender willows in a storm, prone to snapping at any moment.

With a soft howl of anger and pain, she heavily crashed against the ground.

She wanted to stand up, but failed. Her petite body enclosed in the black dress was still trembling. It was very strange, yet it also had an indescribable sort of charm.

After a long time, the power of thunder transmitted to her body through the chains gradually slackened, the lightning and snow simultaneously vanishing.

She arduously sat herself up, her face abnormally pale, fear still lingering in her vertical pupils. The gaze she aimed at Chen Changsheng was no longer crazed and avaricious, but resentful.

Chen Changsheng turned his head to look at her, the corners of his lips perking up in a smile.

His face was currently also very pale, probably because when he was activating the array to break the restriction, he had lost too much blood, consumed too much of his soul. He was well aware that doing things this way would quicken the speed at which his injuries broke, or in other words, he would die earlier than calculated, but he had still done it without hesitation. This was a matter that he had promised her a long time ago.

Before death, he had to accomplish these tasks. Only this way could he leave with his mind at ease.

"What's going on with your blood? It's even better-smelling than when you exploded yourself during Meditative Introspection...just now, I actually couldn't control myself," the little Black Dragon commented, fear still lingering in her voice.

Chen Changsheng pointed at the two chains on her ankles, his meaning very clear. He knew what sort of powerful restrictions the array left behind by Wang Zhice would have for her.

"Since you knew, you should have warned me and let me prepare myself a little."

The little Black Dragon gave him a resentful glare and said, "Truly a bad man."

The wound on Chen Changsheng's wrist was already healed. The Sacred Light that Xu Yourong had placed on his body to seal off his blood had also begun to take effect once more. The blood on the chains had already seeped deeper in or been transformed by the array into energy. He no longer needed to worry about arousing the little Black Dragon's vicious nature or attracting any other experts.

Chen Changsheng walked up to her and placed several dozen pills that he had requested from the priests of the Li Palace into her mouth, and then lightly caressed her back to help her digest them.

The little Black Dragon slightly narrowed her eyes, seeming to take great pleasure in these light pats.

After a moment, he came to his senses, remembering what Mo Yu had once said to Xu Yourong. He realized that she was a girl and that treating her this way was truly rather improper, so he quickly released his hands.

The little Black Dragon opened wide her eyes and glared, very displeased.

"Of course, I also didn't have complete confidence." Chen Changsheng paused, then gave an explanation for her previous reproach, "Back when I risked Meditative Introspection and ignited the snowy plain of radiance in my body, if you did not rescue me, I would already be dead. Since this life was given to me by you, my returning it is only right and proper. If I'm destined to be eaten by someone, you are probably the only person that I would accept."

Perhaps because of that final part about being the only person, the Black Dragon grew happy and content. Then she seemed to think of something and her two cheeks gradually blushed.

She lowered her head, not wanting to look at him, and whispered, "Immoral."

Chen Changsheng froze, not understanding why she was scolding him, why she was angry. After thinking it over, he took out a box and placed it in front of her, saying, "This is for you."

The little Black Dragon raised her head and looked at the box, her bright eyes brimming with curiosity.

"What is it?"

She opened the box, upon which a light illuminated her small and beautiful face.

The box was completely full of rare treasures, precious stones, gold, and silver.

Some had been bestowed by White Emperor City, some by the Li Palace, or gifted to him by the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education. Some of it had been given by Tang Thirty-Six for him to play around with, and some of it was from the Mausoleum of Zhou. There were all sorts of treasures within.

This was one-third of his total property.

Of course, this was his total property after clearly dividing it with Xu Yourong on that winter day last year.

One-third was left for Luoluo, one-third left for his senior brother, and the last third was left for the little Black Dragon. He believed that these three people were the ones that had treated him the best.

Seeing the treasures in the box, the little Black Dragon's eyes grew brighter and brighter.

"Do you like it?" Chen Changsheng looked at her, somewhat nervous but also hopeful.

She lowered her head and softly indicated her approval.

There was no such a thing as a dragon that didn't love gold, silver, or treasure, let alone one that had been imprisoned

underground for several hundred years. Only with the gold and treasure promised by those important figures in the Imperial Palace had she managed to endure.

And these had been especially left by him for her.

She raised her head and said seriously to Chen Changsheng, "Do you know? It's already been many years since I left my home in the South Sea and came to where you humans live, but only after getting to know you did I live somewhat happier days, so I truly must thank you."

Chen Changsheng thought about her experiences, thought about his own life, and naturally empathized with her suffering.

"My happiest days were when I became a spiritual soul and departed with you from the capital. Until we reached Hanqiu City, I saw so many sights and ate so many delicious things."

"The sights in the Garden of Zhou were also not bad."

"I don't like the Garden of Zhou."

"Why?"

"Because my royal father died in there."

Chen Changsheng remained silent.

The little Black Dragon sneered at him, "And in the Garden of Zhou, you and that girl whispered words of love to each other, long forgetting who I was; what's there for me to be happy about?"

Chen Changsheng felt rather helpless, saying, "I didn't know at the time that she was Xu Yourong, and also...in my heart, she's a senior worthy of my respect."

The Black Dragon did not care, resentfully saying, "In any case, you're just an ungrateful and fickle guy."

Chen Changsheng thought, where did 'ungrateful' come from? He suddenly recalled those words the Black Dragon had said before preparing to eat him and thought, if it really is this way, to use such a one-sided oath to restrict the other party's actions is truly rather unreasonable, or perhaps childish.

Although he was not that old, he was always calm and composed, so he naturally wouldn't engage in a childish quarrel with her.

But seeing his silence, she grew even angrier, opening her mouth and blowing on to his face.

She was a Black Frost Dragon, so the breath she blew was her dragon breath.

The dragon breath descended, and based on what had happened the past few times, Chen Changsheng should have been instantly

frozen. This was what she had originally intended, preparing to thoroughly tidy him up and pack him away, yet she forgot that she had always used her original appearance of a Black Frost Dragon to meet Chen Changsheng in the past. Now, however, she was in the form of a human girl. Notwithstanding other aspects of her strength, she at least could not spit out her dragon breath.

The breath she blew now was just a regular breath. This breath was like an orchid, suffused with an indescribably delicate fragrance without the slightest strength. This was the sort of breath that fell on Chen Changsheng's face.

Strangely enough, though Chen Changsheng's body had undergone a perfect Purification through being washed in her dragon blood and could not be pierced by ordinary weapons, and though her breath was clearly lacking in any sort of power, his face still turned red.

The little Black Dragon froze, and then rather foolishly blew on his face again.

Chen Changsheng's face continued to get redder, especially his ears. They were just like his Fated Star, thoroughly red.

The Black Dragon blinked her eyes in confusion. Soon after, she realized what she was doing and countless emotions of shame rushed into her mind. Her small face instantly turned red beyond compare.

She felt her face to be very hot, and even her body as well.

She forgot that she was a Black Frost Dragon who needed only a thought to freeze a volcano.

Volcanoes could be frozen, ice could be melted. She felt her own body going soft from the heat. Lacking strength to support herself, she slowly tilted forward and leaned against Chen Changsheng's chest.

Her breathing was like the winds of a glacier blowing over a snow lotus, gently brushing the edge of his ear.

Chen Changsheng's body seemed to freeze, not daring to move. He suddenly felt a little wet.

She was sticking out her cloven tongue and licking his ear.

"It truly smells delicious." She leaned against his shoulder, whispering, "If you're really going to die, let me eat you, and you can just die in my stomach."

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Chapter 615 – The Cry Of A Young Phoenix Is Just Clear, Nothing More

After some time passed—perhaps very long, perhaps very short—Chen Changsheng awoke from his daze and fled far away.

The little Black Dragon watched his back vanish into the darkness, her face revealing a tinge of fiendishness, especially those vertical pupils of hers. The emotions within them were abnormally cold.

The restriction Wang Zhice had left behind on the stone wall made it impossible for her to recover her true strength, but if she was willing, she could still easily snatch Chen Changsheng and eat him in one bite, or else how could she be the so-called 'taboo' of the Imperial Palace that no one dared to mention?

But she did not do it. The anger in her pupils gradually dissipated, leaving only loneliness, chagrin, and obstinacy.

She clearly understood that Chen Changsheng had escaped not because he was afraid of being eaten, but because he wanted to escape from something else.

Without the Black Dragon's help, Chen Changsheng had no means of using that pool to return to the surface. The path he chose was the one he had taken on his first time, when he had entered the underground space by accident. He pushed upon the heavy stone door and returned to the cold palace which he had not seen for a very long time. When he saw the distant Weiyang

Palace, he couldn't help but feel somewhat emotional.

At the time, Mo Yu had used some miraculous ability to borrow the array of the Imperial Palace and transport him from Weiyang Palace to imprison him in this place. She probably did not expect that he really would bravely venture into the underground space to confront the legendary 'taboo', thus finding a thread of hope. Similarly, he also did not expect that although the 'taboo' was cruel and ruthless on the surface, in reality, it was a somewhat naive and ignorant dragon girl, nor that he would actually have so many connections and stories with this girl.

Standing under the autumn tree by the Black Dragon Pond and examining the famous Tong Palace Array, he fell into deep thought. He was well-versed in the Daoist Canon and had also done considerable research on the topic of arrays. Although he was not at the level of Xu Yourong or Gou Hanshi, amongst the world's cultivators, he would still be considered quite outstanding. It was for this reason that when he was imprisoned by this array, he was able to discover that its roots were deep within this pond.

For the purpose of eliminating the restriction left behind by Wang Zhice, he had prepared for a very long time. Together with Xu Yourong's help, he was confident that it would take at most ten years for those two chains to corrode and lose effectiveness, and the little Black Dragon would regain her freedom. If she were to cultivate that copy of the Scroll of Time he had left in the underground space, she could shorten the time even more.

However, by that time, he would no longer be here.

This was what was meant by 'Thousands of years pass, the white clouds wander carelessly, things are the same but the people are not, the sapling has grown into a lush canopy'.

But in the end, there were still some people or matters that could not be let go.

South Stream Temple had a divine artifact that carried the same name as the famous array of this cold palace. They were both called the Tong Palace.

The Tong Palace was in her hands.

She was probably in the Imperial Palace right now, not far from where he was.

Chen Changsheng circled around the pond, following the stone path to the Tong Palace's back door. Coming to a forest, he gazed at the distant cluster of palace halls.

He did not like dying alone, but he did not want her to see him leaving this world.

In a little while, he was prepared to go to the Garden of Zhou. Nobody was there, nobody could enter.

But before that, there were still some things he needed to do.

From the forest in front of him came a rustling sound. Several of the now yellowing, but still vigorous green, leaves were falling down.

The Black Goat emerged from the forest, slightly tilting its head to the side as it looked at Chen Changsheng, seemingly somewhat puzzled. Silently, it asked why he appeared here today instead of by the pool.

Chen Changsheng clasped his hands and bowed towards the ground at the Black Goat, very seriously prostrating himself towards it, saying, "Many thanks for these last two years of your care."

The Black Goat turned its head towards a certain hall amongst that distant collection of palaces.

Chen Changsheng understood its meaning and shook his head, saying, "I'm not going there."

The Black Goat turned back around and calmly looked at him, its gloomy eyes like the deepest darkness.

"I've lived my entire life seriously, or perhaps rigidly, because I hoped that I could live a few more years this way. Now that I've confirmed that there's no way for me to live a few years longer, after carefully thinking about it, my greatest regret is that I've never lived an unbridled life. I cultivate the Dao of following my heart, but just when have I ever truly followed my heart?"

From the moment he had confirmed that he was going to die, Chen Changsheng had never divulged his true thoughts to any person, but now he was pouring his heart out to the Black Goat.

"So before I die, I've decided to something that I've always wanted to do. If I can succeed, I think that I'll be very happy."

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Kill to the east, kill to the west, kill everything, but it was still all about the word 'kill'.

Kill everyone that opposes you, then there will naturally be no one left that opposes you. Kill and cut down this world that dares to defy your will, and this world will naturally obey your will. But if everyone in the world submits? How to deal with things beyond the world? What about the hearts of the people?

After hearing the Divine Empress's words, Xu Yourong fell quiet for a very long time.

This was the Empress's tyrannical proclamation and also the Empress's teachings to her sole successor.

She had to ponder this for a while. At the same time, she had to silently calculate and plan.

Back when she had said to Chen Changsheng that she was entering the Imperial Palace to request the Empress's assistance, Chen Changsheng had said that there was no meaning to it.

Seeing the Divine Empress's cold attitude, it seemed that this really was the case.

In truth, this was a result that anyone could have predicted.

But she had still come to the Imperial Palace.

So that she could do all that was humanly possible and then leave the rest to the heavens? Because she hoped that she could beg for several dozen days of peace and quiet for Chen Changsheng?

No. Though she was a person of the Dao, she had her own edge and did not practice the principle of nonaction.

From the moment they left Mount Han to last night, she had always been calculating, her forefinger never leaving the Fated Star Plate.

She was attempting to see the Heavenly Dao, to pull apart the dense fog of fate and see the true path forward, but all the results of her calculation were the same.

In order for Chen Changsheng to escape from his fate, the only,

almost illusory, string of fate had its other end connected to the Empress's body.

Logically speaking, this punishment of the Heavenly Dao that Chen Changsheng was suffering had always been the oath that the Empress had sworn to the starry sky taking effect, and the person that wanted him to die the most was also the Empress. Thus, if she wanted to untie that string of fate, it was only right that the solution be found on the Empress's body.

But she knew that the meaning faintly displayed by fate was not this.

To see a mountain as a mountain, as not a mountain, as still a mountain...mountains were still mountains in the end, but their meanings were completely different. (TN: This line is a modification of a Zen koan.)

So she left the Orthodox Academy and came to the Imperial Palace.

She firmly believed that this action would bring about some sort of change, yet a long time had elapsed between her arrival and now with no change occurring.

The porcelain cup still turned under her finger, seeming to never have stopped from daytime until the dark night, like a water wheel in a river, like time itself.

"The art of deduction is ultimately to see all possible changes, yet the Heavenly Dao is indescribable and uncountable, so how can it be calculated?"

The Divine Empress suddenly placed the porcelain cup on the table and glanced at her. This single glance seemed to have already seen through all matters.

After a pause, Xu Yourong responded, "Although we cannot truly touch it, we can still get somewhat closer."

The Divine Empress rebuked, "Right now, you can't even clearly calculate the minds of others, so why speak of getting close to the Heavenly Dao?"

Xu Yourong's face somewhat paled because she had faintly sensed that the change she was waiting for had already occurred, but... that change was not what she wanted.

"You laid down a sword array in the Orthodox Academy and even requested the Li Palace to send assistance. You then came to the Imperial Palace to see me, believing that you could cut him off from the world, cut me off from his world. You would wait for the Heavenly Dao to naturally move as you attempted to find the tiniest change, but you calculated so much, yet you forgot to calculate one thing."

The Divine Empress calmly gazed at her and said, "You forgot that he was also calculating."

Xu Yourong knew that she had made a mistake.

If Chen Changsheng himself left the Orthodox Academy, what then? If she was not present, no person could prevent him from leaving.

The Empress had summoned her into the palace precisely to create this sort of opportunity for Chen Changsheng.

In other words, when she was attempting to choose a way out for Chen Changsheng, the Empress had long since understood what sort of choice Chen Changsheng would make.

"Empress, how can you understand him? Is it because you two are mother and son?" Xu Yourong gazed at her, her voice becoming somewhat clear and cold.

The Divine Empress replied, "When the moment came, you still did not forget to mention this matter in order to pluck at my heartstrings. You're quite a persistent child."

Stubbornness appeared on Xu Yourong's beautiful face as she asked, "But is what I said not a fact?"

"Of course it's not a fact." The Divine Empress's voice seemed as heavy as jade or gold. "I understand him solely because I've understood him before."

She stood up and walked once more to the window, gazing

beyond the palace halls into the distance.

The evening clouds of twilight had transformed into a vast sky of stars. Her voice was also much more indifferent than it was in the daytime, seeming somewhat cold.

"In the eyes of ordinary folk, the so-called Saints know all, yet they do not know that after crossing that threshold, we still stand on the red dust of the mortal world. The reason Saints do not err is that Saints cannot err. Once they err, the red dust will cover their bodies and they will find it a great challenge to free themselves of it."

These words accompanied a clear and cold voice to fall upon Xu Yourong's ears and heart.

"I have never feared such things as the Heavenly Dao, or fate. It wants to make you and me oxen and horse, but I will make it my oxen and horse. I will take up the reins and harness, hang a heavy plow upon it, and use it to open up new lands and expand the kingdom, use it to make good weather for crops. Yet now that I look at it, my heart which thought of putting the Heavenly Dao to use was admitting that it had a use, admitting that it was in some way more powerful than my own abilities. And this was the greatest mistake I made back then. The moment I made this conclusion, my soul was stained with dust that I can never wash off."

The Divine Empress turned to gaze at Xu Yourong.

Perhaps because she was speaking of the Heavenly Dao, her expression was very solemn and serene, her perfect face suffused with a divine aura.

Xu Yourong clearly understood that this was also a teaching, and besides that, there was a true meaning that probably no one other than her had heard.

Ever since she was a child, this sort of scene had occurred many times, so she had long since grown accustomed to them, but this time was different.

Because the Empress was speaking of the most mysterious, most high, most wondrous Heavenly Dao, but the contents were extremely disrespectful to the Heavenly Dao.

Furthermore, she vaguely understood why the Empress was telling her this.

"In the future, there will come a day where you will be as strong as me. I hope that you can be even stronger, so I will not permit you to make the same mistake I did."

The Divine Empress looked into her eyes and said, "If the Heavenly Dao is before you, you should cut it down. If threads of affection are before you, it's even more proper to cut them down."

When Xu Yourong heard this final line, she received proof of her conjecture and her body went cold.

"You are my successor."

The Divine Empress walked in front of her and looked down upon her, calmly continuing, "Any person or matter that will harm your Great Dao, I will kill and cut down."

Xu Yourong's face paled even more. Her usually incomparably bright eyes slightly dimmed.

"Qiushan greatly pleases me, but you would not accept him. This also greatly pleases me.

"You love Chen Changsheng. Although there are many aspects worth liking about him, I still do not like him.

"Your life should not be wasted on these senseless things.

"So the more you care about Chen Changsheng, the more I want to kill him."

Xu Yourong said nothing for a very long time.

Her face continued to pale until, finally, it was like snow, utterly devoid of any other color.

But her eyes had gradually regained their former brightness, like a mountain forest once more welcoming the morning sun after a

fog.

Then, the snowy plain seemed to grow a winter plum, seemed to gain a splash of red. The plum blossom gradually bloomed and her face grew redder and redder.

With a hum, a gale howled through the hall and two pure white wings, ten-odd zhang in length, opened behind her back!

She flew into the air, exuding fierce rays of light and a divine and powerful Qi.

She burned the Heavenly Phoenix true blood in her body, raising her cultivation to its peak, even surpassing the upper limits that her body could bear.

She was the Holy Maiden of the Orthodoxy, representing holiness and light, carrying the infinite divine might granted by the starry sky.

She was still only at the peak of Ethereal Opening and of course had not truly entered the Divine Domain, but in her current state, she already had some of the characteristics and aura of the Divine Domain, completely capable of fighting a battle with the top experts of the Proclamation of Liberation. Even the few experts on the level of the Storms of the Eight Directions would require some time and techniques in order to completely suppress her.

She had never thought about threatening the Divine Empress,

only striving for some time so that she could break this plan that might have been created by the Heavenly Dao or by the minds of men.

Even if she could only release some light, if she could light up the Great Zhou Imperial Palace, perhaps she could illuminate the capital and let the Li Palace see.

However, in the next moment, the wind in this palace hall ceased.

The holy light exuded in all directions vanished without a trace.

The two pure white wings behind her drooped weakly to the floor.

A hand was clutched around her throat.

It was the Divine Empress's hand.

It seemed a very delicate hand, but now it was incomparably terrifying.

The Divine Empress's body was not at all tall or large, but her hand held Xu Yourong aloft in the air.

Two black wings a hundred-plus zhang long unfurled behind her, breaking through the two walls of the vast palace hall, slowly

rising up and down in the darkness.

This scene seemed abnormally mystical and monstrous, yet it also had a sort of hair-raising beauty.

Chapter 616 – Facing Death To Live (I)

The caresses of the night breeze, originating from those massive black wings, dispersed all divinity and light, cut off all sights and senses, brought with it the purest gloom and power.

"The clear cry of the young Phoenix surpasses the old Phoenix... in the end, that is still a matter for the future." (TN: The first part of this sentence is a line from a poem by Li Shangyin. Its meaning is that the young will surpass the old.)

The Divine Empress gazed at Xu Yourong in her hand and expressionlessly noted.

Not a single person could enter this darkness unless she permitted it, like that patch of red.

Mo Yu lowered her head and kneeled outside the hall, not daring to glance inward.

"Send her back to Holy Maiden Peak. Once Chen Changsheng is confirmed dead, release her."

Hearing the Divine Empress's voice, Mo Yu finally dared to raise her head. She wanted to say something, but ultimately chose not to.

The bamboo carriage was prepared and the Black Goat strolled back from some place.

The Divine Empress glanced at the Black Goat. After a moment of silence, she nodded her head.

The wheels of the carriage rolled over the gray stones, slowly heading out of the Imperial Palace.

Mo Yu sat within, gazing at the unconscious Xu Yourong in her lap. She suddenly felt somewhat sad.

She was sad for Xu Yourong, and also for Chen Changsheng.

It seemed that Chen Changsheng's death was certain.

In truth, she was also somewhat sad.

It had been a long time since she had gone to the Orthodox Academy or met with Chen Changsheng. In addition, she had no reason to go, and even if Chen Changsheng died, she had no reason to be sad. When she thought of this, she grew even sadder.

The bamboo carriage seemed to travel slowly, but it traveled with incomparable speed, and there was something indescribably strange about it. Although there were not many pedestrians on the road, there were many people hunting for Chen Changsheng's whereabouts, as well as experts and cavalry seeking to protect Chen Changsheng, yet none of them noticed this carriage.

It didn't take long for the bamboo carriage to depart from the capital's south gate and step upon the official road towards Holy Maiden Peak.

Almost at the same time the carriage left the capital, Xu Yourong opened her eyes.

It was not because she had some hidden technique. This was the Divine Empress's will.

She opened her eyes yet could not make a single move, not even twitch a single finger.

Because a hair clasp was seemingly very casually thrust into her black hair.

Or perhaps it was better to call it a wooden hairpin.

Third-ranked on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, Wooden Sword Little Phoenix.

Xu Yourong could not move, but she could speak.

However, she was clearly not in the mood to speak, and only quietly stared at the roof of the carriage. If her gaze could pierce through, who knew which part of the starry sky it would rest on?

"Every person has their own fate. His fate isn't good; there's

nothing that can be done about that." Mo Yu looked at her with a pitying gaze as she spoke.

Xu Yourong drew back her gaze and looked at her, saying, "I don't feel that he will die."

Mo Yu naturally knew of the current state of Chen Changsheng's body. She thought to herself, even if His Holiness can protect him from being killed by the Empress, how many more days can he live?

Xu Yourong seemed to understand some incredibly important matter. She calmly said, "Since it is his fate in the end, it should operate according to his way of thinking. I wanted to cut him off from the world, but he wanted to go back. The Heavenly Dao wants him to die, but he insists on facing death to live."

"Facing death to live?"

"Do you still remember the story of Divine General Han Qing?"

"I remember."

"Emperor Taizong said before, those who face death to live do not die very easily."

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Chen Changsheng was not considering the problem of life and death. He had already placed life and death out of his mind.

He left the Imperial Palace and came to an extremely secretive place, or perhaps a very ordinary place.

The Plum Garden Inn outside the Mausoleum of Books.

At the beginning, he had lived here for a considerable amount of time. At this place, he had truly gotten acquainted with Tang Thirty-Six.

This inn was very meaningful to him. It was the place where his life in the capital had begun. He now returned to this place, firstly because no one would ever think that he would come here, and secondly because he wanted the final part of his life in the capital to begin from this place.

He had no idea that not long after he left the Imperial Palace, a bamboo carriage drove out of the Imperial Palace with Xu Yourong inside.

He also did not know that at this moment, his senior brother Yu Ren was in the Mausoleum of Books across the river, reading books under the starlight.

On this night, the two most important people in his life were

both very nearby, but he was unaware. His thoughts and energy were completely on himself, on the medicines and magical artifacts on his person, on the various techniques in his sea of consciousness, and in the countless swords within his sheath.

He sat under the tree in the small courtyard, beginning to sort out the state of his cultivation under the starlight.

Because his meridians were all shattered, his current true essence output was even weaker than it was two years ago, not even up to the level of an ordinary Meditation cultivator. But the star radiance scattered about his body was like the snow covering a mountain range. It looked like pieces just scattered about, but in reality, the total area was vast. Moreover, although he had encountered problems in breaking into Star Condensation, it could not be considered a complete failure. On the surface, it seemed as if his cultivation level was paused at the peak of Ethereal Opening, but if he did not care about shattering his meridians again and jeopardizing his life, he could in a very short time condense a domain of starlight.

In other words, if he did not care for his life, then in a very short time, he could gather up a massive amount of true essence and become an initial level Star Condensation expert.

He also knew countless sword techniques, movement techniques, and Daoist techniques.

After he entered Ethereal Opening, the opponents he encountered were mostly Star Condensation experts. The simplified form of the Yeshi Step that had helped him many times

in the past was no longer very meaningful. When comparing the increase in speed brought by this movement technique to his body's own speed, the difference was extremely small. Similarly, ordinary techniques like the Hundred Flowers Sword and the Seven Stars Sword might have some use when facing opponents on the same level, but in tonight's battle, they would be of no use and could be excluded.

He calmed his heart and cleared his mind, removing those assorted sword techniques and Daoist techniques, only leaving behind in his sea of consciousness the toughest, sharpest, and most powerful of techniques. The Wind and Rain Sword of Mount Zhong, the True Sword of the Orthodoxy, the Toppling Mountain Staff, the Sword of Hithering Light, the Three Forms of Wenshui, the Army Shattering Sword...and the three swords taught to him by Su Li.

The Blazing Sword, the Intellectual Sword, the Stupid Sword.

These were Chen Changsheng's most powerful techniques.

To true masters of the sword, perhaps there was no such thing as high or low in terms of swordplay, but there was such a thing as great and small.

These sword styles that Chen Changsheng was most skilled in were all great sword styles, especially the three swords that Su Li had taught him. In terms of both flexibility and atmosphere, they were all extremely great.

Great swords, or perhaps great techniques, were extremely exhausting on true essence and spiritual sense. Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense was extremely stable and powerful, and he also had vast quantities of true essence. However, he had always had problems with outputting true essence, so he could not endure long battles. In many of his past battles, he had strived to bring them to a close as quickly as possible. Only in the final battle of the Grand Examination and in that chaotic battle in Xunyang City, when he had no other choice, had he allowed himself to sink into a bitter struggle. And in truth, those battles were extremely bitter. On many occasions, he had almost lost to his opponent's sword.

Tonight, he was heavily injured. If he forcibly moved his true essence and struck, it was absolutely vital that he not be forced into such a situation. He had to win in a single strike.

He opened his eyes and gazed up at the countless stars in the night sky, beginning to deduce and calculate.

That person was not born impoverished. His birth mother was a concubine of the previous assistant minister of the Ministry of Rites. There were no unbearably painful experiences in his childhood and he had not been lacking for food or clothes, nor was he humiliated by the primary wife. Although his imperial examinations could not be said to have gone smoothly, that was not a unique situation. That person's temperament was extremely cruel and merciless, his strength extremely frightening. His spiritual sense was particularly strong, as if formed from the resentment of millions and boundless suffering. He had experienced it before and it truly was something that no ordinary person could resist...

Countless pieces of information appeared in his sea of consciousness. They were like the stars in the sky, too many to be counted and seemingly randomly clumped together. It was simply impossible to analyze anything useful from them, yet these stars were connected, the invisible lines between them forming a star map, and within, one could naturally find the hidden meaning.

After some time, he stood up and walked out of the Plum Garden Inn.

The Stainless Sword continued to quietly rest in the Vault Sheath, but he had already unsheathed his sword.

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The bamboo carriage followed the official road south. The Black Goat pulling the carriage was most likely not clear on the unstable situation in the capital. It had just spent too long in the Imperial Palace and wanted to go out for a stroll. It didn't find anything fresh about those autumn trees by the road, but it did find the freshly formed dewdrops on the grass rather interesting. Walking and stopping in this manner, it did not seem to move very quickly, yet in the time it took to drink a cup of tea, the carriage had made it all the way from the Imperial Palace to Mount Xiao. With this pace, perhaps they would arrive at Holy Maiden Peak by noon.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's gaze moved from Mount Xiao to the east, arriving at the plains where the mountains came to an

end. In the center of the plains sat a vast city, its walls thick and tall. Purely in terms of spectacle, this city was even more grand and imposing than the capital. It was the nominal capital of the world, Luoyang.

In Luoyang's Market of Eternal Peace, which occupied the best position in the entire city, sat a massive prince's mansion, extravagant beyond compare. The Prince of Xiang, the Prince of Tai...many of those people who were nominally her sons, as well as several of her grandsons, were currently there, embracing singing girls and indulging in all their desires. She did not know if they were doing it for her or her subordinate officials to see, but she didn't really much care.

She drew back her gaze to the capital and saw the old man currently watering his plant in the Li Palace, her relatives in their mansion, the candles in the Little Orange Garden that had not yet burned out, the snow at the bottom of New North Bridge, the crabapple tree in the principal alley of the Northern Military Department, and the young man holding up an umbrella as he proceeded in that direction.

She stood on the Dew Platform, the entire world at her feet, but in her eyes, it was just that person she did not see.

Ten-odd years ago, she believed that this person had died. She had not expected for the person to have survived. From the day she confirmed this fact onward, a crack appeared between her and the Pope. Besides her and the Pope, no one in the world had perceived this fact. The storm over the capital remained as docile as it had been for the past ten-odd years, but in the end, things still could

not be the same.

She clearly understood that this person had allowed Chen Changsheng to come to the capital to intentionally divulge this secret, precisely so that she and the Pope would grow suspicious of each other. But she could only accept it, because time could not be reversed. That incident of the Orthodox Academy had occurred and the Pope could not trust that she would have no complaints on this matter.

From their first meeting in the Hundred Herb Garden, she had never liked that person, even detested him. Only when she realized that he was not merely Shang Xingzhou but also Daoist Ji did she begin to face him directly. Those matters which she did not understand at the time finally had an answer.

The name Shang Xingzhou represented the legitimate line of the Orthodoxy and those enemies that opposed her.

The name Daoist Ji represented the will of Emperor Taizong, his unfulfilled wishes.

This was the true cause of her wariness.

Chapter 617 – Facing Death To Live (II)

In these countless years, she had seen many heroes and towering figures, full of spirit and mettle, or cultured and refined, or cherishing the world, or bemoaning the state of the world and pitying the fate of mankind. She had seen countless geniuses and experts, respecting only themselves, or standing aloof from the world, or enjoying a simple life with wife and children. Among these people, only that man had ever made her feel fear. Even though she had now caught up to his level, even if she would often show an expression of ridicule or disdain when mentioning that man, she was forced to concede that even today, that man's name still brought about the faintest shiver of fear in her.

Perhaps it was because when she first met that man, she was just a naive, vivacious, and cute girl who knew nothing of worldly matters while he was a supreme expert sitting high above, the Son of Heaven that, though still alive, was destined to be recorded down in the annals of history as the supreme emperor throughout the ages?

"Emperor Taizong, you've been dead for so many years. Are you still not willing to rest in peace?"

She raised her head to gaze at the place where, many years ago, that brightest star in the sky existed. After an interminable silence, she creased her brow.

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This early autumn night was truly endless, making it very easy for people to recall old acquaintances.

When the Tianhai Divine Empress was thinking about Emperor Taizong, Zhou Tong was thinking about that once-Principal of the Orthodox Academy, Shang Xingzhou.

Zhou Tong was a purely evil person, delighting in the suffering of enemies, and even his friends, though besides Xue Xingchuan, he didn't have anyone that he could truly call a friend. This did not at all mean that he was a maniac, that there was a problem with his mind. On the contrary, he was more clear-headed and rational than the vast majority of the world's people, and this was the true evil.

In order to continue this beautiful life of his, he needed to maintain his status, needed to ensure that nothing could shake the Divine Empress's seat upon the imperial throne.

It now seemed that the person most likely to shake the Empress's seat was naturally Chen Changsheng.

Perhaps he would die in a few days, but Zhou Tong would not risk it by silently waiting for it to occur.

This was the problem produced by Shang Xingzhou, the Imperial clan, and countless other great powers. He felt that he had already found a solution to this problem, but first, he had to find the

problem.

As he pondered how to crack this problem, he developed more and more admiration for Shang Xingzhou, ultimately even feeling reverence.

This world was the world of the strong. One person could take control of a storm of one direction, one Saint could shake the world in all eight directions.

Shang Xingzhou was fully deserving of the title of expert, a grand master belonging to the legitimate line of the Orthodoxy. Although his reputation was not prominent and he had never ranked within the Storms of the Eight Directions, everyone was clearly aware that he had assuredly already stepped into the Divine Domain, and his cultivation was unfathomably deep. But the true reason for Zhou Tong's reverence was Shang Xingzhou's deep planning and farsighted thinking.

In Xining Village's old temple, he raised Chen Changsheng for fifteen years. Without teaching him anything, he sent him off to the capital and then wrote the Pope a letter.

He was still alive. This had originally been a mercy the Pope had shown to him, but now, it became his weapon. As for the fellowship between the two members of the legitimate line of the Orthodoxy, it was naturally also a weapon. And Mei Lisha, as representative of the Orthodoxy's conservative faction, an old man who wholeheartedly desired for the Imperial clan to regain the imperial throne, had perhaps long known of Chen Changsheng's identity, thus causing him to be in such a rush. He had even gone

so far as to somewhat pull up the roots so as to help Chen Changsheng mature faster, ensuring that in the short span of two years, he became successor of the Orthodoxy. In this way, when the Divine Empress would act to kill Chen Changsheng, the Orthodoxy would have to protect him. The alliance that had never been very firm would naturally fall apart, the Divine Empress would lose her greatest supporter, and the Chen Imperial clan would regain the throne!

A trivial matter like sending Chen Changsheng to the capital would shatter the peace of the Great Zhou Dynasty that had persisted for almost twenty years!

Everyone said that the Saints regarded the world as a chessboard, playing out moves with no regret, but Shang Xingzhou dared to use Saints as chess pieces, to use the succession of the Orthodoxy as a means. As for emotions, experiences, and hearts, these things were casually picked and randomly tossed away. Truly an extraordinary schemer!

Of course, this was all deduced by Zhou Tong, because he was also a schemer.

The more he admired Shang Xingzhou, the more he was filled with regret, regret that he had not killed Chen Changsheng sooner.

"What I want is not the process, but the result."

He stood on the stone steps and looked at his subordinates kneeling in the courtyard, smiling as he spoke. "I don't care what

sort of analyses or judgments you make, I just want to see him dead."

He was not a pervert, so when he was executing or torturing ministers, he would not intentionally act gentle and refined or put a slightly bashful smile on his lips. When he did smile, it was mostly because matters had developed in a way that rendered him speechless, so speechless that he could only bitterly smile, just like now.

"He is a living person, and a famous person, and above all, he is still a sick person...and it turns out that none of you can find him?"

Zhou Tong gazed at his subordinates below, not speaking of everything that he was thinking about.

Only he knew that Chen Changsheng was a person that was about to die.

Whether he was a famous person, sick person, or a person about to die, when it came down to it, he was a person that should be very easy to find.

The Department for Purging Officials had several thousand spies and even more informants, but they had used half the night and still failed to find this person.

Zhou Tong truly could not help but be somewhat inclined to smile at this outcome.

Seeing the smile on their lord's face, not a single one of the officials of the Department for Purging Officials in the courtyard relaxed, and not one dared to not attempt to smile along with him. The faces of these officials were all very pale, and their black hats were unable to keep out the starlight descending from the sky, making their complexions seem particularly dismal.

Zhou Tong turned to the official kneeling at the very front, his smile fading as he calmly noted, "The Imperial Court pays you the highest salary, and I naturally had the highest expectation of you."

This official was the high official of the Department for Purging Officials assigned to intelligence. Normally, he traveled without restriction between the various ministries, government offices, and halls of the Orthodoxy. He received no small measure of respect, but now, when his direct superior so indifferently picked him out, he could not help his body from fiercely shuddering.

When expectations were high, the disappointment was naturally also great. He knew that he had to do something, or else Lord Zhou Tong would inevitably have some other method to make him never forget tonight's failure.

There was only a crisp snap, the sound of a finger breaking!

He had resolutely broken the pinkie finger on his left hand. He was clearly in pain—his face paled even further and his voice trembled.

"This lowly official is incompetent. I ask Your Excellency for another hour. I will definitely find that person!"

Zhou Tong gazed at this official, his expression unchanging. On the other hand, Cheng Jun, standing on the side, knit his brow. In his view, snapping a pinkie finger was not proof of resolution at all. If these were the redcoated cavalry directly under his command, he would absolutely have required this official to chop off an arm.

In Cheng Jun's view, Lord Zhou Tong was being far too compassionate by requiring only a single finger be broken, but in the view of these officials in the courtyard, it was already an extremely clear and terrifying warning. The officials spilled out of the small courtyard. Leading their respective subordinates, they once more dispersed into the capital's darkness to begin their search, their actions and mood even more hurried and nervous than before.

"Using half a night and still not finding a single clue, showing that he really does have the ability to hide his tracks...he is the future Pope, after all."

Cheng Jun followed Zhou Tong into the room, very respectfully pouring a cup of tea for him. Suppressing his voice, he asked, "In your view, rather than randomly searching without any destination in mind, wouldn't it be better to find where he wanted to go after leaving the Orthodox Academy, then go there in advance and set a trap for him?"

This small courtyard within the alley of the Northern Military

Department contained countless precious tea leaves, but Zhou Tong only ever drank one brand, the [Great Crimson Gown](#) that was produced in the south.

(TN: Great Crimson Gown, 大红袍, is also a type of very expensive oolong tea.)

Right now, the tea being steeped in the pot was the Great Crimson Gown. Because it had not been brewed for long enough, the tea poured into the cup was somewhat lighter in color.

Zhou Tong gazed at the light-shaded tea in his cup and said, "If it were possible to guess where he wanted to go, the Li Palace would not also be so hurried right now."

Cheng Jun revealed a sinister smile as he said, "Then we can just force him to appear."

Zhou Tong's gaze still rested on the teacup as if staring at it for a long time would cause the tea within the cup to turn a darker shade.

Hearing Cheng Jun's suggestion, his expression did not change. He gave an indifferent 'oh', then asked, "Force him how?"

As the most wanton of the Eight Tigers, Cheng Jun's methods had always been simple and cruel.

"Even if he wants to stay far away from the storm in the capital, he still has people that he cares about." Cheng Jun clenched his teeth and then said, "Let us go and catch a few of the Orthodox

Academy's students, snatch a few of the peddlers in Hundred Flowers Lane. We'll cut off a hand or foot and throw it into Vermillion Bird Street. I don't believe that he won't hear of it."

Zhou Tong suddenly smiled as if the tea within the cup really had darkened.

The rich and fragrant Great Crimson Gown looked just like blood.

Bloody and cruel didn't mean ineffective. Zhou Tong gazed out the door. His own subordinates would slip into the darkness with this intention, and it could be presumed that it wouldn't take long for this rather crazy idea to spread to the entire capital and find its way into Chen Changsheng's ear.

"Did you not ever think that this signifies the formal beginning of war with the Li Palace? Back when Chen Changsheng came here to demand his people back, the Orthodoxy cavalry surrounded me in this place."

Zhou Tong smiled at Cheng Jun and asked, his smile containing some extremely profound meaning.

Cheng Jun knew that Zhou Tong wanted to know how determined he was.

He had thought very clearly that he was just like Zhou Tong. If the Divine Empress were to lose power, only the path of death

would remain for him.

As a consequence, he came personally to the alley of the Northern Military Department tonight and, disregarding his usual wariness, placed all his redcoated cavalry under the command of the Department for Purging Officials.

He looked back at Zhou Tong, maintaining his humble posture but sharply speaking with a heroic aura, "Since both parties cannot coexist, we cannot let them advance a single step more!"

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No one could have imagined that at this time, Chen Changsheng had already returned to the Orthodox Academy. To be more precise, he had returned to the lane outside the Orthodox Academy.

He was utterly unaware of the blood-soaked decision just made in the Department for Purging Officials.

He came to Hundred Flowers Lane, not to protect the students of the Orthodox Academy and the peddlers in the surrounding area from whatever wicked methods Zhou Tong might commit in his madness, but because he had other business to conduct.

He stood in the shadows of Hundred Flowers Lane, watching

those flickering figures belonging to people of the Imperial Court and the Li Palace, and watching that carriage at the mouth of the street upon which the gazes of these figures ultimately rested.

Last autumn, the Tianhai clan and the Orthodoxy's new faction, for the purpose of suppressing the Orthodox Academy, used the All-School Martial Exhibition proposal to dispatch many experts to challenge the Orthodox Academy, a very interesting story. At that time, he had noticed the carriage at the mouth of the street.

At every match, this carriage would invariably appear.

This carriage had never intentionally concealed its identity. Everyone knew that it was from the Department for Purging Officials.

To merely know of it was not enough. Zhexiu had especially investigated this carriage, and the information that had turned up was now within his mind.

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The alley of the Northern Military Department was not at all narrow. Actually, it was a straight street, able to accommodate two carriages traveling side by side. The government office of the Department for Purging Officials was also very large. Besides the sinister prison, there were also countless buildings. That famous

courtyard in which the crabapples bloomed was in the deepest part. To reach this place from the exterior of the government office would require a very long time and countless checkpoints.

The carriage returning from the Orthodox Academy directly entered the government office. Driving along the stone-paved roads within, it passed through the checkpoints, those fierce and terrifying Cerberuses not revealing any peculiarity. Finally, the carriage stopped outside the small courtyard.

It was late at night, yet many people in the capital found it impossible to sleep. The same could be said for the people within the small courtyard.

Zhou Tong and Cheng Jun were currently seated and drinking tea, but it was a mystery as to whether or not they could grasp the true flavor of the tea in their current mood.

When the sound of a report came from outside the courtyard, Cheng Jun's mood somewhat improved.

This carriage was bringing back the most recent situation around the Orthodox Academy, a matter which he deeply cared about.

The door to the courtyard was pushed upon. Footsteps rang out and then stopped. Presumably, the official had already halted his steps and was now standing within the courtyard.

Cheng Jun turned his head towards the courtyard and realized

that this official had merely lowered his head slightly and seemed to have no intention of voluntarily giving his report, so he couldn't help but frown slightly.

As an important minister of the Imperial Court, his reputation was incredibly disastrous, but his abilities were actually not bad. He governed with extreme rigor, and if this were one of his redcoat cavalry reporting official business so lazily, he would certainly have thrown the teacup and forbidden the official from moving...

But this was the alley of the Northern Military Department, thus not his domain. He seemed crude and ruthless, but in reality, he was very smart. He would never discipline Lord Zhou Tong's subordinates in his presence. Just like a moment ago, when he felt that the official of the Department for Purging Officials breaking his pinkie finger was too light a punishment, but said nothing, so would he maintain his composure this time.

But in the next moment, he found it impossible to maintain his composure anymore.

Because the official in the courtyard had raised his head.

It was a very young face.

Cheng Jun stood up in shock.

Zhou Tong turned his body towards the courtyard, his eyes narrowing, a chill running through his body.

Chen Changsheng.

The visitor was Chen Changsheng.

The entire capital was searching for him, but they had searched for an entire night, yet not a single person had been able to find his tracks.

The assassins and killers of the Department for Purging Officials were searching for him all over the place, but he had appeared in the Department for Purging Officials!

What did he want to do?

Zhou Tong quietly stared at the young man in the courtyard, not speaking a word as he slowly put down his teacup.

The Great Crimson Gown tea in the cup had been brewed for too long, so the richness of its color was as dazzling as blood.

Chen Changsheng quietly looked back, his right hand rising to grasp the hilt of his sword in the autumn wind.

In this seemingly endless autumn night, Zhou Tong had constantly been searching for him, wishing to kill him.

Scarcely realizing that he was also searching for Zhou Tong,

wishing to kill him.

Chapter 618 – Killing Zhou (The Beginning Of The First Season)

Chen Changsheng stood in the courtyard, gazing at the two people within. He had met Zhou Tong several times, but he didn't know him very well. He didn't even recognize the other person, but there were not many people that were able to sit across from Zhou Tong and drink tea. He could get a rough guess as to this person's identity, so he had a reason to kill him.

He had come to kill Zhou Tong, because he was about to die.

Before he died, there were always some things he wanted to do, some things that followed his heart. This could be considered his final bout of madness, or a firework released before the curtain fell.

He was the successor of the Orthodoxy, so actively or passively, he would gain many enemies and rivals, but he truly did not have many people that he wished to die, no personal enemies. There were no demons in the capital, Liang Xiaoxiao had committed suicide, Zhuang Huanyu had committed suicide, so only Zhou Tong was left.

Zhexiu was imprisoned in Zhou Prison for a very long time and tortured into an appalling state. At the time, when he had seen the wounds on Zhexiu's body, he had secretly decided that he would kill Zhou Tong.

The people of the Orthodox Academy knew that Zhexiu remained

in the capital because he also wanted to accomplish this task. Chen Changsheng decided to complete it for him because Zhou Tong had tortured Zhexiu due to his connection to the Orthodox Academy. Besides this, there were many reasons to kill Zhou Tong, but there was no need to mention them. In the end, it was just because he wanted to.

Chen Changsheng just wanted a person like Zhou Tong to die.

In this world, countless people wanted Zhou Tong to die, and they had wanted it for so many years, but they only wanted it. Not many people dared to do it.

Chen Changsheng dared.

He acted according to a plan Zhexiu had developed beforehand, hiding below the carriage to easily pass through the checkpoints, using the special characteristics of his body to conceal himself from those sinister and terrifying Cerberuses, and not touching the array within Zhou Prison. Finally, he successfully reached this small courtyard and arrived in front of Zhou Tong. But could he kill him?

Zhou Tong was frightening not merely because of his personality and methods. In these past years, he had raided the mansions of countless princes and dukes and obtained many techniques and secret manuals. His cultivation had long since reached the upper level of Star Condensation, and there were even rumors that he had cultivated to the peak. And the Great Crimson Gown, his secretive mental technique, was terrifying to the extreme! In the years when the Divine Empress held power but had not formally

ascended to the throne, the Imperial clan had sent countless experts and high-minded individuals who had sworn oaths to avenge the innocent that had died miserable deaths in Zhou Prison, had attempted countless assassinations, but he was still living very well.

These years were already proof that no person could kill Zhou Tong. No matter how astonishing Chen Changsheng's talent in cultivation was, he was still too young, his level not beyond the peak of Ethereal Opening. And after his failure to break through in Mount Han, his injuries not yet recovered, where did he get the confidence to invade this place and come kill Zhou Tong?

Cheng Jun stared at the young man in the courtyard, thinking of these matters.

Chen Changsheng was also thinking about these matters.

All of their minds were busy, but silent, not stirring the night breeze.

As he thought about these things, Chen Changsheng did not halt his movements. He took out the Stainless Sword and thrust the handle in the sheath.

In Xunyang City, when confronting Zhu Luo, Wang Po had done this, as had he.

A short sword grew long, adding to its sharpness, like a spear in

hand as one faced the battlefield.

This indicated that he was very cautious and also very resolute.

He gazed at Zhou Tong.

He didn't even glance at the person next to Zhou Tong.

He did not know that this person was Cheng Jun, leader of the redcoated cavalry and also an expert of the middle level of Star Condensation.

This was not looking down on an opponent, this was complete disregard.

The person he wanted to kill was Zhou Tong. Anyone that blocked his sword had to die, no matter who they were or how strong.

Cheng Jun sensed his killing intent. He had never imagined that in someone so young, still carrying such a young and inexperienced face, he would actually be able to see such composure and such unswerving will. He found it even more impossible to imagine that in this small courtyard within the Department for Purging Officials, there was actually a person that dared to exude such killing intent towards Zhou Tong.

This killing intent was not targeted at him, but he was right next to Zhou Tong, and was even a little closer to Chen Changsheng

than Zhou Tong. As a result, his face instantly grew paler. Not because he was afraid, but because he was wary, because his heart was heavy, because he was taking in a deep breath.

He was one of the few middle level Star Condensation experts in the capital. Now, his true essence was beginning to explode. As he breathed in, the crabapple tree in the courtyard violently shook despite the lack of wind.

Countless gusts of night wind were sucked into his lungs. His chest slightly bulged just like the surface of a war drum!

A sharp cry like that of some bird of prey emerged from his lips! This sharp cry instantly tore through the night sky and was heard throughout the entirety of Zhou Prison, and perhaps even in all corners of the capital!

Cheng Jun felt that he should not be afraid of Chen Changsheng, even if he was the future Pope. Chen Changsheng was still too young. Although his cultivation level was already outrageously high amongst his peers, it was still far inferior to Cheng Jun's. Moreover, the injuries within his body were probably still not cured...but Cheng Jun was very afraid of dying.

As the leader of the Great Zhou Dynasty's redcoated cavalry, he had worked hand in hand with Zhou Tong over these past years. Receiving the Empress's decrees, or falsely using the Empress's decrees, they had slain many princes and ministers, scholars and priests, rich merchants and gentry, and innocent commoners. He had seen far too many dead people, so he grew more and more afraid of death.

Furthermore, he was very smart, a person that clearly knew his own position. He had never looked down on any sort of opponent. Everyone said that Chen Changsheng had failed to break into Star Condensation at Mount Han, but he was still the future Pope, a true genius. Cheng Jun felt that it would not be excessive to treat this young man with the highest level of regard, so he immediately chose to sharply cry out in order to move the capital.

As this sharp cry rang out, Chen Changsheng moved!

Before the sound of his footsteps could be heard, the bottom of his boots shattered the stone tiles, the splashing stone fragments piercing through the sound and leaving only a buzzing sound.

His body instantly vanished. With a shattering howl, it soared towards the top of the stone steps like an arrow, the sword in his hands ramrod-straight as it stabbed forward.

Shing!

The sound of this sword was incredibly pure without any noise, seeming particularly clean.

Because his sword stabbed straight forward without any deviation or change.

To say it another way, this attack of his had no technique.

Chen Changsheng's swordplay was learned from Su Li, but it was of his own construction. After that battle in the storm of Xunyang City, and especially after the several dozen battles in front of the Orthodox Academy in the autumn of last year and his battle with Xu Yourong on the Bridge of Helplessness, the entire continent was forced to admit that his talent in the path of the sword had already reached a world-shaking level. If he were not so young, he would have already been considered a great expert of the sword.

But in tonight's assassination attempt on Zhou Tong, his first strike was so simple that there was no swordplay to speak of within it. It was just incomparably straight, incomparably swift. It was like a straight line was being drawn in the lantern light between the room and the courtyard, and the end of this straight line was Zhou Tong.

At the moment, Cheng Jun still stood between. Chen Changsheng's strike was very fast, very sharp, but to a middle level Star Condensation expert like him, it wasn't at all difficult to deal with. He could use a movement technique to temporarily avoid the edge and then counterattack. Of course, the simplest method was to use his Star Domain to firmly receive the blow.

But Cheng Jun chose without hesitation to yield.

Because this sword intent of Chen Changsheng's was too formidable, its edge too sharp.

The yellow lantern light within the room suddenly dimmed for an instant as Cheng Jun's body drifted to the right like a puff of black smoke in order to avoid this sword. His face was rather pale,

his expression rather panicked.

This was the scene Chen Changsheng most wanted to see.

He had never thought about whether this strike of his could kill this man, and his sword had never been meant for stabbing this man. He didn't know the name or surname of this man, but he didn't mind stabbing him to death if needed. But for this strike that contained all his spirit and will to fall upon this man's body was a complete waste.

This sword of his had to fall upon Zhou Tong's body.

Perhaps because the sword glow was too bright, the dusky yellow lantern light within the room suddenly brightened.

Staring at the sword flying towards him, Zhou Tong's face grew somewhat pale. Not from fear or unease, but disdain and anger.

He was well aware that Chen Changsheng's seemingly simple strike was actually not simple at all, containing countless transformations.

These transformations were assuredly exquisite and complex to the extreme, containing all of Chen Changsheng's realizations on the path of the sword. Even he would find it impossible to see them clearly in advance.

However, he was not at all afraid, or even concerned. He was

calm, easygoing, and self-confident as usual.

Because the cultivation gap between him and Chen Changsheng was too great. No matter how inconceivable Chen Changsheng's progress on the path of the sword was, it could not make up for this fact.

He would absolutely not compete with Chen Changsheng in terms of swordplay; he could absolutely not give the sword energy contained within Chen Changsheng's ramrod-straight strike, and the sword techniques following after, a single chance to be used. He chose to directly use his unfathomable cultivation to crush Chen Changsheng into a wisp of a ghost within a sea of blood.

A clear bong rang out through the room.

This was the sound made by Zhou Tong's pale finger rapping against the teacup.

The porcelain cup met with the fingertip that had dug out countless eyes, but the sound of their collision was extremely clear.

The tea within the cup began to ripple.

The tea was a tribute from the south, the finest Great Crimson Gown.

Tonight's tea had been brewed for too long and was somewhat excessively strong, its color a dense red like blood.

The ripples of the tea were waves rising from a sea of blood.

The light within the room suddenly turned red.

A sea of blood appeared in the room. The teapot and teacup were both swallowed by blood. The pungent smell of blood rose up with the roiling of this sea of blood, beginning to pervade the surroundings. Even the green leaves of the crabapple tree in the courtyard outside turned red, as if they had been watered in blood for countless years.

In this world of blood, Zhou Tong's pale white face was particularly striking, abnormally frightening.

In a breath's time, his spiritual sense had already enclosed a world several hundred zhang in radius, transforming the real world into a sea of blood.

This blood-colored ocean incessantly soaked into his red official's robe, turning it an ever deeper shade of red, a sickening sight.

Within the sea of blood, it seemed like countless wronged souls were mournfully calling for help and cursing.

Chen Changsheng's sword was still three feet from Zhou Tong, but these voices had already entered his ears.

Just as he heard these suffering voices, a powerful and frightening Qi, brimming with murderous aura and pain, directly invaded his sea of consciousness!

This was Zhou Tong's most frightening secret mental technique, the Great Crimson Gown!

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Chapter 619 – Killing Zhou (The Middle Of The First Season)

In the autumn of last year, on the first day of the All-School Martial Exhibition, in front of the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng broke through Zhou Ziheng's Star Domain in a single strike. Using the unexhausted sword energy, he brought Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po to take a carriage and intrude upon the alley of the Northern Military Department. Arriving at this courtyard of falling crabapple blossoms, they straightforwardly demanded that Zhou Tong release Zhexiu.

At the time, Zhou Tong had expressionlessly gazed at them, and they saw a sea of blood.

Both he and Tang Thirty-Six found it impossible to bear this mental pressure and pain and almost fell apart. Even long after they had departed this courtyard, they still could not forget the fear and terror brought by that sea of blood. Furthermore, Zhou Tong had only released a part of his might at the time, not like now where he immediately attacked.

It must be known that when Zhou Tong displayed the full power of his Great Crimson Gown, even if his opponent were an upper level Star Condensation expert, only an abnormal human like Painted Armor Xiao Zhang, who was constantly insane, would not be affected in any way. Even someone like Liang Wangsun would choose to temporarily protect his heart.

Chen Changsheng was just at the peak of Ethereal Opening. No matter how stable and formidable his spiritual sense, how much

progress he had made in this one year, how could he oppose the sea of blood?

It now seemed that either his mind would be shattered by Zhou Tong's mental strike or he would maintain his consciousness by sheer fluke and be forced to draw back his sword, doing his utmost to retreat.

To cultivators, if they could not escape Zhou Tong's sea of blood, this sea of suffering, they could only sink within.

But if he chose to sheathe his sword and retreat, could he really escape this courtyard?

What happened next, no one expected.

Chen Changsheng's face was very pale, but he did not choose to escape, nor did he collapse.

His body went from illusory to real, his speed becoming many times slower, but he still gripped his sword and stabbed forward.

It was like he was advancing forward, waist-deep in a sea of blood. Although difficult, although slow, he pushed forward without stopping.

Seeing the light gradually tearing through the sea of blood, the approaching clear sword glow of the Stainless Sword, Zhou Tong narrowed his eyes!

Why was Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense at such a formidable level!

A bit more than two years ago, the Orthodox Academy only had Chen Changsheng.

In the library when fixing his Fated Star, his spiritual sense flaunted itself in the heavens above for nine days until it reached the depths of the sea of stars.

At the time, the Divine Empress and Mo Yu had a conversation on the Dew Platform.

His spiritual sense was very powerful, but not overbearing. The true aspect of his spiritual sense that was different from anyone else's was that it was very serene.

Only with serenity could one achieve great goals.

Could one travel great distances.

Now, his spiritual sense was not just serene, it was tenacious.

In this one year of time, he had borrowed the ten thousand sword intents within the Vault Sheath to hone and wash his spiritual sense innumerable times.

His spiritual sense had passed through that ocean of sword intent countless times before touching that black stone monolith on the other shore, never once having lost its bearings.

How could Zhou Tong's sea of blood possibly have the ability to make his spiritual sense sink down?

His wrist still bore a string of stone pearls. There were not many of them, but each one was a Heavenly Tome Monolith. Those stone pearls were now exuding faint threads of light, protecting his Dao heart.

Besides the reasons described above, the most important reason still lay within his body.

His current mental state was currently at the absolute highest it had ever been in his seventeen years of life.

He knew that he was about to die, so he walked towards death.

He faced death to live, and once he grew calm, there was nothing to fear.

Very rarely were there people who had his sort of experience. Of course, there was presumably no one that would want to have this sort of experience.

It could even be said that at least for these few days, he had already seen through life and death.

So he could resist the attack of Zhou Tong's mental technique, could persist forward in this frightening sea of blood that clung to him, until finally, the sword glow illuminated the room, the sword energy finally cut a path through the sea of blood, and he arrived in front of Zhou Tong!

Zhou Tong's dark and deep eyes were illuminated by this sword glow, a hint of remorse faintly visible within.

He knew of the masterful level to which Chen Changsheng had cultivated the sword, so he did not wish to contend with Chen Changsheng on this aspect. He only wanted to use his most powerful technique and resolve this all in the shortest amount of time. As a result, he allowed Chen Changsheng to raise his sword intent to its maximum extent while he directly used his mental technique to cut off space and strike. However, he had not expected for Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense to be so powerful, able to firmly resist his Great Crimson Gown and crash through the sea of blood, thus bringing that incomparably sharp sword right in front of him.

A tinge of wariness appeared in Zhou Tong's eyes.

Even as an upper level Star Condensation expert, he could not disregard the sword in Chen Changsheng's hands.

From the snowy plains to Xunyang City, from the capital to Mount Han, from Xue He to Liang Hongzhuang, from Lin Pingyuan to Zhou Ziheng, far too many Star Condensation experts

had lost to Chen Changsheng's sword.

But there was still no fear in Zhou Tong's eyes. He was no ordinary Star Condensation cultivator, he was a peak-level Star Condensation expert!

The gap in cultivation between him and Chen Changsheng was too great, so even if a problem occurred with his response and Chen Changsheng's sword arrived before him, he still had nothing to be concerned about.

Because in front of him was his world.

Countless specks of starlight lit up within his blood-colored official's robe. They were not silver, but also the color of blood.

The ocean of blood enveloping Zhou Prison suddenly fell back like the ebbing tide, condensing into a ball of blood.

This ball of blood was incredibly real as if condensed from actual, fresh blood.

The crabapple tree in the courtyard regained its green leaves, yet like it had been afflicted by some illness, it shed countless leaves.

Countless dried husks of insects appeared in the cracks of the stone steps.

Zhou Tong's body was immersed within this sphere of blood, presenting an extremely bizarre sight.

This sphere of blood was his Star Domain.

This was his world.

Zhou Tong's face was very pale, flickering in and out of the blood, sinking down and floating back up.

The blood began to seethe, releasing an unpleasant and bloody scent. For anyone who smelled this scent, their soul would easily become discouraged and descend into madness, all the way until the soul left the body and died.

Only after Cheng Jun retreated to the back of the room was he able to remain free of its effects. As he watched this sight, his eyes were filled with fear.

Chen Changsheng had bathed in dragon blood, and his stainless constitution had its own special characteristics, so he was not affected and continued to stab towards the ball of blood.

Zhou Tong's pale face in the mist of blood was even more distinct. He gazed upon the sword glow and Chen Changsheng with eyes of absolute indifference.

The Star Domain of a peak Star Condensation cultivator could be said to be infinitely close to perfection. It possessed almost no

weak points, let alone any gaps.

How could Chen Changsheng's strike break through this sea of blood?

The Stainless Sword was clearly stabbing towards Zhou Tong's throat, yet no one noticed that in the space above Chen Changsheng was another sword glow!

Whoosh! The sword glow pierced through the sea of blood and stabbed at his left eye!

Zhou Tong's cruel and thin lips issued a harsh whistle as his two sleeves swiftly danced!

The crimson official's gown violently shuddered like a turbulent sea of blood. The immortal birds and monsters woven into the official's robe seemed to come alive, and from the abyss of the sea of blood came an uncountable number of formless wailing souls. With mournful shrieks of resentment, they hurled themselves at the sword image.

This bright sword glow easily tore those wailing souls into pieces and continued to advance forward, stabbing at Zhou Tong's left arm!

With a squelch, a spurt of blood shot out!

The perfect Star Domain of a peak Star Condensation cultivator

was actually broken!

Gazing at this absolutely impossible scene, Cheng Jun's face paled, his body trembled, and he was utterly powerless to speak.

Yes, this had originally been an absolutely impossible matter, but when Chen Changsheng was wielding the sword, this matter seemed to become comprehensible.

It could be said without exaggeration that in the countless years between now and the most distant past, he was the one that had accomplished the feat of an Ethereal Opening cultivator breaking a Star Domain the most times.

Because in the Mausoleum of Books, he had understood the relationship between the multitudinous stars in the sky and the Star Domain of cultivators, and because in the desolate lands of the north, the sword styles that Su Li had passed down to him had conferred upon him two intelligent eyes that could see through a Star Domain.

The Intellectual Sword was a sword style, or method of battle, that was extremely taxing on the spiritual sense, exhausting on the mental faculties. It was a method Su Li had passed on to him specifically for breaking through Star Domains.

The focus of this sword style was to comprehend the relationship between the starry sky and living beings, from this calculating the gaps in a cultivator's Star Domain.

Chen Changsheng's experience of comprehending the Heavenly Tome Monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books was unique, so although his calculation abilities were lacking compared to Xu Yourong and Su Li, his comprehension of the Intellectual Sword was not.

From the Plum Garden Inn to here, he had been constantly calculating, all for the purpose of finding, or guessing at, the weak points of Zhou Tong's domain of blood.

His sword had long since been unsheathed, so how could it miss?

Blood was sent flying as the sword intent erupted, and the temperature of the courtyard rapidly climbed. Chen Changsheng knew that the difference between him and Zhou Tong in terms of actual cultivation level was enormous, so to succeed, he did not dare tarry. He used his spiritual sense to ignite the radiance in his body and transform it into an unimaginable amount of true essence which he poured into the Stainless Sword to propel it forward!

The Stainless Sword glowed even brighter, exuding sacred white rays of light and heat, ready to destroy Zhou Tong's life in the next instant. Yet at the moment of truth, this scene did not occur...the real sword clearly pierced through the sea of blood and stabbed into Zhou Tong's body, yet it seemed to stab into nothingness, nothing beneath the edge of the sword!

Zhou Tong's real body was not in the sea of blood!

The great crimson official's robe gently swayed in the night wind. At some point, he had drifted into the air, emitting a blood-soaked and monstrous might!

A sphere of blood appeared in the palm of his right hand. Was it his Star Domain of blood?

The Star Domain was the most powerful defensive tool of Star Condensation cultivators and could be considered their personal world. Just who would be willing to leave their own world and then place this world in the palm of their hand?

Chen Changsheng had seen such records in the Daoist Canon, but he had never encountered it in an actual battle. This was his first time seeing such a scene.

Zhou Tong had left his own world and made the sea of blood that was his Star Domain a ball of blood in his palm.

This also meant that despite the countless complex and challenging calculations engaged in before using the Intellectual Sword to break through the Star Domain, it was already impossible for him to harm Zhou Tong's body. On the contrary, his sword had entered the sea of blood, which meant that it was now under Zhou Tong's control. It was impossible to continue stabbing forward.

From the feeling transmitted by the edge of the sword, Chen Changsheng very quickly confirmed this heart-chilling fact.

Zhou Tong looked down on him from above and expressionlessly asked, "This is that sword?"

From the moment he determined to kill Chen Changsheng, even before the summer of last year, he began to gather all the information concerning Chen Changsheng. That carriage had always been parked inside Hundred Flowers Lane, so he knew what Chen Changsheng had done in the wilderness and in Xunyang City. He knew that Su Li had taught him three sword styles, and even that one of these sword styles was focused on calculation.

Since he knew, as one of the most famous schemers of the continent, an important personage who planned and schemed, how could he not calculate that Chen Changsheng would use this sword?

The domain of blood that he had spread was real, that it had been broken by Chen Changsheng was real. His response was very risky, even if he had already prepared a backup plan.

All this was for a single objective.

He wanted to shatter Chen Changsheng's sword.

Chapter 620 – Killing Zhou (The Middle Of The First Season Again)

Everyone said that Chen Changsheng was a genius of cultivation. After all the things that had occurred in the past two years, this conclusion had already received the widespread acknowledgment of the entire continent. But in reality, many people had no idea in just which aspect he was strongest: quantity of true essence or comprehension ability? Of course, being well-versed in the Daoist Canon was an extraordinary feat, but between accumulated knowledge and fighting power, specific techniques were required to act as a bridge.

Only after the three great feats that were sending Su Li ten thousand li back south, the several dozen matches in front of the Orthodox Academy, and the battle of the Bridge of Helplessness, did the people gradually begin to affirm that the most formidable aspect of Chen Changsheng was his sword.

This made many people, especially the priests of the Orthodoxy, feel rather surprised, even vaguely uneasy.

Of course, the Orthodoxy also had sword styles, like the True Sword of the Orthodoxy, the Heavenly Dao Academy's Sword of Hithering Light, or even the temple sword of the south, but the Orthodoxy's resources were even more numerous in other aspects. Despite being the successor to the Pope, what Chen Changsheng was most skilled in was not the divine arts of the Orthodoxy, not the Daoist techniques of the Daoist Canon and its scriptures, but the swordplay he had inherited from Mount Li...

Zhou Tong had an even clearer understanding of Chen Changsheng and knew that his strength not only lay in his impressive talent in the sword, but also in the sword itself.

He vaguely understood that Chen Changsheng had some sort of fortuitous encounter within the Sword Pool of the Garden of Zhou and he had dispatched people in an attempt to find out where those remaining famous swords had been hidden. Yet a year had passed and even the spies of the Department for Purging Officials that covered the world had ultimately only managed to find one in the Orthodox Academy's latrine. The rest of those renowned swords had all vanished without a trace, a fact that made him very vigilant.

He was even more vigilant about that sword displayed in the open, the sword currently being held in Chen Changsheng's hand.

The Stainless Sword, the newest divine weapon on the Tier of Legendary Weapons.

This dagger had nothing mystical about it besides its sharpness.

But just as the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had commented, any item that was developed to the extreme was extremely terrifying.

This dagger was far too sharp, able to easily pierce through the divine artifact of the Tianhai clan, the Six Protections Divine Armor.

Although Zhou Tong was a grand expert at the peak of Star Condensation, his body as hard as steel, he did not dare test his body against this sword.

And he did not want Chen Changsheng to display the full extent of his cultivation in the sword.

So even in this room, he was prepared for Chen Changsheng when the latter raised his head.

He spread out his Star Domain of blood and waited for Chen Changsheng to use his sword to break it. He then used an extremely risky and mentally exhausting method to forcefully break free of his own world and grasp the sea of blood in his hand.

Chen Changsheng's sword was in the sea of blood and was thus in Zhou Tong's hands, under the inflexible control of his might.

No matter how sharp this sword was, it was incapable of touching his body or soul. No matter how profound or masterly Chen Changsheng's path of the sword was, there was no more space to display it.

At this moment, Chen Changsheng's Intellectual Sword had fallen into nothing but space, and then it had fallen completely into Zhou Tong's calculations.

Sensing the boundless energy transmitted through the edge of the sword, sensing that blood-soaked and terrifying might, Chen

Changsheng raised his eyes up to the great crimson official's robe drifting in the air, his face abnormally pale.

From the time he had unsheathed the Intellectual Sword in the Plum Garden Inn to now, he had already consumed too much mental power and focus.

This was the first time since he had learned this sword in the wilderness that his Intellectual Sword had been completely ineffective.

His sword was now in the hands of his powerful foe, his path of the sword bogged down in the sea of blood, unable to express itself.

His face turned pale, perhaps because he had exhausted too much of his mental power or because he had lost his self-confidence.

The Stainless Sword was now stained by blood, no longer as bright and incapable of continuing his sword techniques. However, he still had one sword technique that did not require movement, that he could still use.

His spiritual sense descended upon the snowy plain outside his Ethereal Palace. The flakes of snow formed of condensed star radiance flew crazily into the air and then were all completely ignited, releasing in an extremely brief span of time a limitless quantity of light and heat.

A powerful Qi and a seemingly real flame exploded from the edge

of the sword, attempting to break through the gruesome and evil sphere of blood within Zhou Tong's palm.

Boom! A gale howled through the room as countless rays of light burst through Zhou Tong's fingers, illuminating his finger bones through the skin!

The sphere of blood wrapped around the dagger shuddered in unease, its surface fiercely seething. Drops of blood shot out from the sphere, and when they fell against the ground, the gray stones hissed as they eroded!

Zhou Tong's expression became solemn. He knew that one of Chen Changsheng's sword techniques could massively increase his true essence output, but he had not imagined that this attack could be so explosive!

Another harsh whistle issued forth from his thin and stern lips. The night winds howled into the room, causing his red official's gown to madly flap in the wind as an extremely cruel and powerful Qi appeared!

As the great crimson official's gown madly danced, Zhou Tong's body grew several times larger, bursting through the back half of the room and transforming into a magical image ten-odd zhang tall!

Chen Changsheng's sword exploded with light and heat, sword intent and killing intent!

Countless bright rays of light and shapeless sword intent shot out together from Zhou Tong's fingers, cutting the walls of the room into innumerable chunks of stone.

Yet the sword was still unable to truly break out of Zhou Tong's palm, unable to break out of the pearl of blood formed from the sea of blood that was Zhou Tong's Star Domain!

This was precisely the gap between peak Star Condensation and peak Ethereal Opening that nothing could offset. No matter how high Chen Changsheng's cultivation in the sword was, how sharp the Stainless Sword was, there would still be no means of doing so.

Before Zhou Tong's magical image that seemed like a demon god, Chen Changsheng on the ground seemed all the more puny and insignificant, just like an ant. The light, heat, and sword intent emitted from his sword seemed extremely dim in Zhou Tong's palm, just like a flickering firefly, on the verge of extinction at any moment.

Would this assassination on this night in early autumn just end like this? Was Chen Changsheng's facing death to live going to ultimately end in him helplessly awaiting the arrival of death?

No, although he was just a firefly, many of them could still illuminate the dark night, and even more would ultimately burn the plains, and even burn the heavens themselves. The Blazing Sword that Su Li had taught him drew materials from the Secret Sword of the Golden Crow, used the energy of the Burning Heaven Sword, but its true imposing manner came from the last move of the Mount Li Sword Style. The special aspect of that move was

precisely...to cast away one's life!

When Chen Changsheng came today to kill Zhou Tong, he had never thought about returning alive. He had truly come to face death in order to live, and had long pushed life and death out of his mind.

He knew that he was about to die, so he was naturally able to use his life however he pleased.

If there really was such a thing as the Heavenly Dao above the starry sky, it would probably be able to perceive his current mood. If there really was such a thing as fate within the starry sky, then his fate was still within his hands.

Suddenly, another extremely tiny firefly appeared. It was on his wrist.

This firefly continued to grow brighter and brighter until it finally became a star.

Soon after, several more of these lights appeared on his body, star after star igniting upon his body.

The places where these stars appeared were all at his Qi openings.

At Mount Han, he had done something similar. At the time, he had nearly died. But now, since he was going to die anyway, since he had already prepared himself for death, he no longer cared.

He had long since made the preparations to once more light up his Qi openings in this courtyard of crabapple blossoms, to bring the sea of stars once more into his body!

The radiance of the stars descended from the heavens, noiselessly passing through the destroyed room and falling upon his body, causing those stars on his body to grow even brighter.

Countless stars were faintly visible on his clothes, connecting into lines, connecting into pieces, transforming into a star map, condensing...a Star Domain!

After Mount Han, Chen Changsheng once more condensed his star!

Zhou Tong's expression subtly changed.

He knew in Mount Han, it was precisely because Chen Changsheng had attempted to break into Star Condensation that he had suffered severe injuries. So he had not imagined that at this moment, Chen Changsheng would actually attempt to condense his star again, and even succeed!

Starlight vanished into Chen Changsheng's body. His Qi did not decrease, but rather rapidly increased, blocking the pressure of the sea of blood. The edge of the sword burst with light and heat as if it wanted to burn away the ball of blood in Zhou Tong's palm, while the sword intent seemed already on the verge of breaking through the blood!

Zhou Tong's face became rather pale, and the hairband holding his black hair snapped. His hair danced in the wind as his Qi rose once more, seeking to forcefully suppress the sword intent in his hand!

As long as Chen Changsheng's Stainless Sword could not break out of the sea of blood that was his Star Domain, then there was no possibility of him losing this battle!

If this battle continued to develop in this fashion, if Chen Changsheng's sword remained under control, unable to add to its sharpness using the sword energy, then it would truly be unable to break through Zhou Tong's sea of blood.

Even if he had succeeded at condensing his star, he was still only at the initial level of Star Condensation, still very far from the peak.

But even if his Stainless Sword could not move, it did not mean he could not attack. The sheath called the Vault Sheath still contained countless swords.

With a swish, a cut seemed to be slashed through the space of this room. For no reason at all, ten-odd clear sword cuts appeared on the trunk of the crabapple tree in the courtyard!

An ancient sword flew out of the sheath gripped in Chen Changsheng's hand. Traveling along the Stainless Sword, it stabbed into the sea of blood within Zhou Tong's palm!

This sword was called the Yue Maiden, precisely the renowned sword that Mo Yu had sought from him but failed to obtain. This sword had once slept within the sea of grass within the Garden of Zhou for several centuries and was speckled with rust, no longer the image of intimidating radiance it was in the past. However, in these two years of nourishment within the Vault Sheath, it had already regained its edge of the past!

With a whoosh, the Yue Maiden Sword plunged into the sea of blood!

It was swiftly followed by countless other swords flying from the sheath, stabbing into the sea of blood in an unending assault!

For several centuries, ten thousand-some famous swords remained buried in the Sword Pool of the Garden of Zhou. Only when Chen Changsheng brought the Yellow Paper Umbrella into the plains did these swords begin to wake up. Together with Chen Changsheng, they battled against the monster tide, broke the Soul Pivot of the Mausoleum of Zhou, and then held up the vault of the sky. Finally, they departed with him together from the Garden of Zhou, returning to the world that they had left a very long time ago.

Many of these famed swords returned to their former sects and monasteries, like the temple sword or the Sword of Holy Light. Some swords found new opportunities, like the Mountain Sea Sword and the Demon Commander's Banner Sword. Many swords were hidden by a certain person in various niches within the Orthodox Academy. And there were many swords that had always

remained with Chen Changsheng, at least six thousand of them.

As comrades-in-arms, as fellow soldiers, when today Chen Changsheng was challenging a most powerful and frightening foe, confronting a most challenging and dangerous situation, how could they allow themselves to be outdone?

Sword after sword exited the sheath, striving to be the first to charge forward!

In a flash, the courtyard was filled with an awe-inspiring sword intent!

Let alone the crabapple tree, even those hard gray flagstones were covered in countless perfectly straight sword cuts!

Cheng Jun let out a shriek of fear as he sent his cultivation soaring. Holding out his two palms like metal shields in front of his body, he made to escape the room.

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Chapter 621 – Killing Zhou (The End Of The First Season)

Countless sword glows surged out of the sheath and exploded against the sea of blood. Muffled booms and sounds of slashing resounded all at once, dazzling light illuminating the small courtyard. They shone upon the severed walls, the cut-riddled crabapple trees, and the viscous sea of blood, and also shone upon Zhou Tong's pale face.

These swords were like innumerable meteorites descending from the sky, carrying a horrifying light and heat as they incessantly stabbed at the blood and pressure.

Zhou Tong's cultivation was already at the peak of Star Condensation and he had already made preparations for Chen Changsheng's tricks. Chen Changsheng's Intellectual Sword had failed to find a true gap and, on the contrary, had actually fallen under his control, but how could his Star Domain endure the assault of so many swords? No matter how close to perfection, it still was not true perfection. As long as there was a gap, it would inevitably be pierced through!

The sphere of blood condensed from the sea of blood had imprisoned the incomparably sharp Stainless Sword within it. Now, under the assault of countless sword glows, it was beginning to show signs of fracturing.

There was a pop like a leather bag filled with wine being stabbed by a sharp sword, or like the paper of a window being lightly poked through by a finger.

The sea of blood had broken!

Zhou Tong's complexion turned abnormally pale, his eyes growing even deeper and quieter. In the deepest part of his eyes, a tinge of fear was visible.

Innumerable sword glows pierced through the sea of blood, carrying an awe-inspiring sword intent as they fell upon his body!

With the harsh whistling of swords slashing down, countless real streams of blood shot into the night, accompanied by an angry and pained howl.

In an instant, Zhou Tong's body was covered in several hundred slashes with fresh blood flowing out of them, even white bone faintly visible!

Zhou Tong knew that Chen Changsheng had many swords, and had also thought of the possibility that he might have placed those swords within the sheath known as the Vault Sheath, but he had never expected for Chen Changsheng to have the ability to simultaneously control all of them!

It must be known that these swords were all swords of the most outstanding and fearsome reputation, handed down from ancient times. For what reason could a youth who had just entered the initial level of Star Condensation be able to control them?

Blood spurted crazily into the dark courtyard, flowing into the cracked flagstones, and also pouring into that seemingly illusory Star Domain of blood.

The sea of blood had been broken, but it had not scattered. On the contrary, it grew even more violent with the flowing of Zhou Tong's real blood, the blood-soaked aura growing even stronger.

A hand emerged from the sea of blood, emerged from the darkness—it was Zhou Tong's left hand. His palm was now covered in countless wounds, flesh coming apart and drenched in blood. It even seemed like two of his fingers had been shorn of all flesh by the sword intents, leaving behind only white bone, an abnormally horrifying sight.

Just like the miserable situation of those prisoners he often saw in the prison below this courtyard...

This hand of shattered flesh and bone trembled in the wind as if it could snap at any moment, yet it fiercely and persistently moved forward, extending towards Chen Changsheng's throat.

White bones emerging from a sea of blood!

Under the assault of several thousand sword glows, Zhou Tong had suffered severe wounds, but since he had not instantly died, he still had the ability to fight!

He floated in the air, his body covered in the blood. His great

crimson official's gown had long since been soaked through, dripping blood incessantly onto the floor.

The front of the official's robe had already been cut into tatters by the sword intents, revealing the object behind.

Not his body, but an incredibly bright flexible armor, suffused with a faint sacred aura. On the flexible armor, at his chest, was an extremely tiny hole.

Chen Changsheng's eyes slightly narrowed, immediately recognizing...that this was the treasure of the Tianhai clan, the Six Protections Divine Armor!

The tiny hole on the Six Protections Divine Armor had been personally made by him last autumn in front of the Orthodox Academy.

That the Stainless Sword could break through the Six Protections Divine Armor did not mean that these renowned swords had a similar ability.

The Six Protections Divine Armor was the most famous flexible armor on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, even approaching the efficacy of a divine artifact, allowing Zhou Tong to successfully block the majority of these several thousand sword glows!

Why had this divine armor appeared on Zhou Tong's body?

That left hand of white bone pierced through the darkness and the sea of blood, snatching at Chen Changsheng's throat.

Zhou Tong's sinister and furious voice resounded in Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness, "Did you think I didn't make the slightest preparation!"

The crimson official's gown soaked in blood wildly danced in the destroyed courtyard, sprinkling blood in all directions, as well as his anger and resentment.

The terrifying might of the sea of blood enveloped the courtyard.

The several thousand bright sword glows had broken through the sea of blood and flown straight into the night sky, unable to immediately return.

Chen Changsheng used the Yeshi Step to repeatedly retreat!

However, it was hard to cross the sea of suffering, and the same applied to the sea of blood.

No matter how erratically his figure moved, it ultimately still remained at its original position, the Stainless Sword still unable to escape Zhou Tong's hand.

With a dull click, the hand of white bone dripping blood gripped Chen Changsheng's throat.

Even though his body had been bathed in dragon blood, it still could not resist the full strength of this bony hand emerging from the sea of blood. Chen Changsheng's throat was almost crushed, yet not a drop of blood emerged.

Zhou Tong stood in front of him, his official's robe reeking of blood. It was just like some damp swamp, its smell repulsive.

Chen Changsheng was very pale, but his eyes were very bright.

Zhou Tong's face was very pale, his eyes very dark and serene.

This was the closest the two had been since the beginning of the battle, not even a foot apart.

Would this bitter struggle end like this?

No, Chen Changsheng did not think so.

Neither did Zhou Tong.

Zhou Tong was the person who had killed the most in the world, who had seen the most death, so he was the most fearful of death and did not want to die.

He had lived his life with prudence, never missing out on a single detail.

He did not know that Chen Changsheng would come to kill, but in these several decades, people would attempt to kill him at any time, so he was constantly prepared.

When Chen Changsheng appeared in this courtyard that once bloomed with crabapple blossoms, his preparations and prudence both showed their use.

He knew how capable Chen Changsheng was, how many fortuitous encounters he had.

He knew that Su Li had taught Chen Changsheng three swords, knew that Chen Changsheng had taken countless swords out of the Garden of Zhou.

He naturally had corresponding responses, like the sea of blood that was his Star Domain becoming a sphere of blood in his hands, or the Six Protections Divine Armor hidden under his crimson official's robe.

Was this all of it? No, he knew that Chen Changsheng still had more stores to pull upon, like the magical artifacts Princess Luoluo had gifted to him, or some life-protecting item that Su Li might have left for him, or the Divine Staff the Pope had bestowed upon him, so he naturally had correspondingly powerful responses.

Even when he was heavily injured, his blood and flesh sliced into a miserable state by those sword glows, he still did not use his most powerful techniques, because he always remembered that Divine

Staff.

The Divine Staff that represented the power of the Orthodoxy, the Divine Staff that was said to possess the ability to split the heavens and earth.

It's already reached this point, I'm clutching your throat and bringing a cruel fate. What are you still waiting for?

Zhou Tong's eyes became abnormally deep and quiet, narrowed like some sort of monster until they almost became straight lines.

He knew that in the next moment, Chen Changsheng would use the Divine Staff of the Orthodoxy and make his most decisive attack.

He was waiting for the moment that light arrived.

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Innumerable sword glows pierced through the sea of blood and flew into the night sky, still yet to return.

The hand of white bone drenched in blood clutched Chen Changsheng's throat.

This was the moment he was closest to death, and also closest to Zhou Tong.

Chen Changsheng had been waiting for just this moment.

He struck.

Just as Zhou Tong had expected, he struck with light.

Zhou Tong was made abnormally pale under the illumination of this light, yet there was no surprise or fear upon his face ,because all this was as he had expected.

The blood-colored official's robe was suffused with a bizarre and mystical luster under this light. As blood dripped to the floor, a magical artifact exuding an ancient Qi floated out of his sleeve and stood in front of the light. It was a mirror, the ancient Qi exuding a mysterious aura. The surface of the mirror was as smooth as water, like it could reflect all light.

If Chen Changsheng were able to recognize this bronze mirror, he would know that although the mirror could not completely obstruct the light of the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff, it was enough to buy Zhou Tong a little time.

He only needed the briefest amount of time for that hand of bone dripping blood to twist off Chen Changsheng's head from his neck.

Yet this sort of event did not occur.

The deep and quiet look in Zhou Tong's eyes was driven away by the light, revealing a tinge of fright.

Because the light heading towards his body was not a piece, but a streak of light.

A streak of incomparably bright light flashed across his eyes.

Where did this light come from?

It was not from the sword glows swiftly flying back.

Similarly, it was not the sacred light emitted by the Divine Staff.

This streak of light was pure without the slightest impurity. Solely because of this, it was monstrously terrifying.

A streak of light that was resolute, fierce, breathtaking.

Zhou Tong's eyes were the first to see this light, thus his eyelashes were halved. Soon after, a line of blood appeared on his eye as it too was halved down the middle.

The bronze mirror that had floated out of his sleeve was utterly useless, halving down the middle.

This fierce blade glow seemed to rise up from the dome of the night and descend to the Yellow Springs, slashing right through him. (TN: The Yellow Springs is a name for the Chinese underworld.)

A shrill and wretched howl burst from his bloodstained lips.

The countless magical artifacts on his person exploded one by one, fireworks seeming to rise from the courtyard, yet it was impossible to stop that light from descending.

The great crimson official's gown crazily danced in fear, his body becoming a gloomy shadow as he retreated into the depths of the courtyard, yet he could not avoid the descent of this light.

The streak of light descended upon his body.

The ties of the Six Protections Divine Armor were broken.

His earlobe was cut off.

His shoulder was chopped open.

His left arm was chopped open.

Before this streak of bright light, all things, even the light emitted from other sources and the wind were all cut apart.

This streak of light was a blade glow.

The blade glow descended, a straight line extending from Zhou Tong's face to his body, from his left eye to below his ribs.

With a ploof, a stream of blood spurted out of his eyes, his left cheek peeled away in the wind, his left shoulder was cut away, his left arm fell to the ground.

Then, he finally crashed heavily against the floor, spitting out a thick ball of congealed blood.

What sort of blade was this?

Chen Changsheng walked out of the ruins, a blade in his hand.

It was the kitchen knife he had taken from the Orthodox Academy's kitchen before leaving.

This was the most frightening blade in the world since time immemorial.

Before this blade, even mountain ranges and rivers would be halved.

One blade, two halves.

Chapter 622 – A Voice Comes From The Depths Of The Darkness (I)

Chen Changsheng, his body covered in starlight, walked towards the shattered sea of blood.

It penetrated through his clothes like several hundred flickering stars.

Zhou Tong lay collapsed in the ruins of the courtyard, incessantly vomiting blood, already unable to stand up.

From the moment the battle began, Cheng Jun had hidden himself in the shadows. But now, the entire courtyard was destroyed, so there were naturally no shadows either, thus his body was revealed.

As the sole eyewitness to this battle, the leader of the Great Zhou Dynasty's redcoated cavalry stood in a daze for a very long time.

Chen Changsheng had actually won? A heavily wounded youth actually took on peak Star Condensation expert Lord Zhou Tong directly in head-to-head battle and actually won!

The fighting ability that Chen Changsheng had displayed in this battle had completely exceeded his imagination, no, the entire world's imagination.

At this moment, Chen Changsheng had already walked to the ruins. His face was pale and his body swayed as if wanting to fall.

In this life-or-death battle, he had obtained the final victory, but he had also paid a nigh unimaginable price, with almost no true essence left in his body. Even more terrifying was the price paid for forcefully breaking into Star Condensation. With the meridians in his body ruptured once more, his blood containing limitless vitality and danger was currently seeping and flowing in his internal organs.

A harsh light suddenly flashed through Cheng Jun's eyes.

Chen Changsheng had displayed an unimaginable strength in this battle, and even now, he still could not comprehend what that final breathtaking and fierce blade glow was. However, it was very obvious that Chen Changsheng was on the verge of collapse and probably could no longer fight, so he wished to seize the moment.

He raised his right hand in the night wind, hanging it over his waist, preparing at any moment to take out a magical artifact and launch a sneak attack.

Just then, Chen Changsheng turned his head and glanced at him.

His gaze descended, his spiritual sense descended, his thoughts moved.

In the night sky above the ruined courtyard came the shrill howls

of countless swords. Soon after, innumerable sword glows descended from the sky.

Those several thousand sword glows that had previously exited the sheath to destroy Zhou Tong's Star Domain of blood now obeyed Chen Changsheng's intention and returned to the world.

An awe-inspiring sword intent enveloped the ruins, and the whistling of the swords ceased. What followed was a light piercing sound, like a cloth being broken through.

Cheng Jun lowered his head and saw only a bloody hole in his stomach.

Soon after, more sword glows pierced through his body.

More and more bloody holes appeared on his body.

Several thousand sword glows, several thousand holes. They were so densely packed that this body ended up as a dense profusion of holes, all them spurting blood.

Because there were too many holes, his blood was instantly emptied out and the dusky light from behind the courtyard shone through the holes in his body. His body looked just like a particularly unique lampshade.

Cheng Jun raised his head and gave a perplexed glance towards Chen Changsheng, then his body immediately collapsed, turning

into a pile of blood and flesh on the floor. Only his head was kept in relatively good condition.

Several thousand sword glows passed through his body and swept around the courtyard before finally returning to Chen Changsheng's sheath.

The two crabapple trees, with the gentle caress of the breeze, became piles of sawdust and minced leaves. The several dozen houses of which the courtyard was the center were completely slashed into ruins.

Cheng Jun's shock and confusion were because even if Chen Changsheng had forcefully broken into Star Condensation, logically speaking, he still should not have been able to defeat a grand expert on Zhou Tong's level.

But in reality, no one had ever seen Chen Changsheng's true strength, no one knew how powerful he was if he displayed his full might.

Xu Yourong probably knew, but she had never personally witnessed it.

Zhou Tong only knew that he possessed many ancient swords of renown, that he had learned the sword from Su Li, but he did not know that he had practiced Wang Po's blade intent, even less the fact that he had learned Zhou Dufu's Halving Blade Style. Zhou Tong knew that he was carrying the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff, yet he had no idea of Su Li's letter in his bosom or the five Heavenly

Tome Monoliths on his wrist.

Tonight's battle was the first time Chen Changsheng had displayed his full might.

No, even at the end, he still had not used all his methods, because there was no need.

Chen Changsheng had used what Zhou Tong knew and did not know to perfectly design tonight's battle, obtaining the final victory.

On the journey back south from the snowy plains, Su Li had taught him many things—how to march troops and fight wars, how to lay plans and design strategies—and all of it had been used tonight.

This was the true Intellectual Sword. From the beginning to end, all the particulars had been under his control.

Of course, he was ultimately able to win over Zhou Tong primarily because of that final blade.

That blade had used Zhou Dufu's blade style, but it had borrowed Wang Po's blade intent.

Wang Po's blade intent rested on the word 'straight'.

The 'straight' of '[come straight to the point](#)'.

(单刀直入 means 'to enter with only a single blade', which in turn means to go straight to the issue without beating around the bush.)

How one should live out one's life, Chen Changsheng did not know, but he knew what he wanted to do the most before he died: kill Zhou Tong.

So he came to the alley of the Northern Military Department, entering with a single blade. He wanted to kill Zhou Tong, so he had the ability to kill Zhou Tong.

Gazing at Zhou Tong, collapsed in a pool of blood amidst the ruin, Chen Changsheng was currently not thinking of those important ministers, great generals, or innocent commoners that had died miserable deaths in Zhou Prison, nor of the fact that Zhexiu had once suffered hideous tortures here. He was not thinking of anything. He dropped the kitchen knife in his hands to the ground, gripped the Stainless Sword as the wind blew about him, and walked forward.

He only needed to walk two steps, the sword would fall, and Zhou Tong would die.

To do this, he had no hesitation, no sympathy for the evildoer. He would give no explanation or elegy to the evildoer.

But...he suddenly realized that he could not step forward.

His face became abnormally pale.

At this time, he was just like a seriously ill child.

The night breeze gently blew across the ruins of the courtyard, where both sword glows and sea of blood had vanished without a trace. Amidst the breeze, a faint principle or law appeared to hold fast his steps.

This was a principle or law that he currently could not break through, an existence that exceeded the scope of his comprehension, yet it was also an experience that he seemed to have experienced in his past.

He gazed into the depths of the night, looking to see something. Ultimately, he saw nothing, but then he heard some things. He heard the sound of the blowing breeze, the plaintive cries of the autumn insects in the distance, the sound of something howling through the air, the thunderous sound of hooves from the street, the exhaling of experts, the sound of battle, the sound of blood splashing.

The courtyard returned to silence for only a moment as the darkness was torn apart by an even deeper darkness. Ten-odd assassins of the Department for Purging Officials, transformed into ten-odd streaks of black light, arrived on the scene. They were late because of the shock over what had happened, and the first thing they did was to guard Zhou Tong. Simultaneously, several assassins with cold and sinister Qis lunged at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng knew that he would most likely have no

chance of killing Zhou Tong tonight.

This fact made the hand gripping the sword grow somewhat cold, his body growing cold with it. He did not care about those assassins of the Department for Purging Officials assaulting him but continued to peer into the depths of the darkness, hoping that the other party would appear and give a few words of explanation. But the darkness was still as before, causing his nostrils to gradually flare.

Only those closest to him knew that this meant he was very angry.

The person concealed within the darkness was also probably well aware of this point.

The black-clothed assassins of the Department for Purging Officials were like a part of the darkness. They noiselessly reached Chen Changsheng, resolutely raised metal spikes coated with poison, and stabbed at him.

Right now, Chen Changsheng's true essence was already exhausted, his internal injuries breaking out, but logically, he should still have some fighting power, at least enough to kill these assassins.

But he did not move, only gazed into the depths of the darkness. His eyelashes slightly drooped, concealing the disappointment and faint sorrow within.

Whooshwhooshwhooshwhoosh! Several dozen whooshes came in quick succession as many bright streaks appeared in the gloomy ruins of the courtyard.

These streaks of light were all crossbow bolts carrying divine energy, their origin the divine crossbows of the Orthodoxy cavalry.

Those several black-clothed assassins gave muffled groans and dodged with all their might, yet they could not escape this rain of crossbow bolts. They were cruelly struck and then disappeared in puffs of smoke.

Many hasty footsteps rang out, and a door was heard being forcefully opened, as well as eaves and old roof tiles shattering in the night. A hundred-odd Orthodoxy cavalry from the Li Palace dismounted and poured in from all sides, coming in from the main street, flipping over walls, and jumping over buildings. In the shortest time possible, they completely encircled this courtyard, at the same time placing Chen Changsheng under heavy guard.

Just when the Orthodoxy cavalry charged into the office of the Department for Purging Officials, a streak of fire suddenly appeared high in the night sky.

Xue Xingchuan had come!

His hand held a metal spear and he stood before Zhou Tong. With a grave and stern look, he stared behind the Orthodoxy cavalry at Chen Changsheng and then raised his right hand.

With this movement, from the darkness behind the ruins of the courtyard appeared the silhouettes of many Imperial Guards.

Those soldiers were carrying crossbows, the bolts suffused with a gloomy and terrifying sharpness.

There was a deathly stillness as the two sides stood off against each other. No one spoke, and no person dared to be the first to fire their crossbow. Everyone was watching Xue Xingchuan's right hand.

Everyone knew that his right hand would certainly fall, but no one knew if it would fall gently or with force. These two actions reflected two completely different intentions.

This also meant that tonight in this capital, the future of the Great Zhou Dynasty would follow these actions into two completely different situations.

"Let's stop it here." An elderly voice emerged from behind the crowd.

The crabapple trees in the courtyard had all been transformed into kindling, the houses were already ruins. Only the remains of the stone arch leading outside were still left.

Mao Qiuyu and a Daoist nun dressed in priestly robes walked in from the remains of the stone arch.

Xue Xingchuan narrowed his eyes, recognizing the Daoist nun dressed in priestly robes. It was precisely the permanent representative of the Li Palace in the south, Archbishop of the Divine Edict, An Lin, yet he did not know when she had returned to the capital.

Of the Orthodoxy's Six Prefects, two were already present.

And Mao Qiuyu was holding in his hands a pestle faintly suffused with light, an important treasure of the Li Palace.

"Chen Changsheng attempted to murder an important minister of the Imperial Court. Could it be that the Li Palace wishes for the Imperial Court to act like this matter never happened?"

Xue Xingchuan did not turn to look, but he knew of Zhou Tong's miserable situation where whether he was alive or dead was still unknown.

He said these words not because he was Zhou Tong's only true friend in this world, but because he was a Divine General of the Great Zhou, he represented the will of the Divine Empress.

Mao Qiuyu walked in front of Chen Changsheng and calmly looked back. "In these past few years, Lord Zhou Tong has murdered so many of the Imperial Court's important ministers, and the Imperial Court has always treated them like they never happened. Principal Chen is the next Pope; what does it matter if he does something like this once or twice?"

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Chapter 623 – A Voice Comes From The Depths Of The Darkness (II)

Hearing this statement, Xue Xingchuan narrowed his eyes even harder, slightly tightening the grip on his spear.

He was the second-ranked Divine General of the continent, his strength far surpassing ordinary peak level Star Condensation experts, faintly exceeding them by at least half a level. Taken together with the fact that he was in the prime of his life, at his peak in terms of spirit, bearing, or anything else, many people even believed that he had surpassed the guardian of the Mausoleum of Books, Divine General Han Qing.

Even if Mao Qiuyu and An Lin joined hands and had the assistance of one of the Li Palace's important treasures, Xue Xingchuan was confident he would be able to handle them, but could he really keep Chen Changsheng here?

Just then, a massive boom could be heard from the long street running parallel to the alley of the Northern Military Department, followed by the stamping of hooves, and then the collapse of buildings into plumes of dust!

Everyone in the ruins of the courtyard turned in that direction and saw that the buildings along that street had already been destroyed, revealing the scene on the main street.

Bright candles in lanterns and blazing torches cast a dusky yellow light over the street, yet when falling upon the armor, they seemed

to give no warmth whatsoever.

On one end of the street stood eighteen cardinals of the Li Palace, possessing profound cultivations, and also several hundred Orthodoxy cavalry with crossbows in hand.

On the other end of the street was a dense tide of troops belonging to the capital's City Gate Department and excellently equipped Imperial Guard. At the very front was Xu Shiji himself, a stern and solemn look on his face.

The standoff between the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court had already persisted for the entire night.

At the very beginning, the two sides were both searching for a person, but now their swords were drawn and crossbows nocked, ready to strike at any moment. In truth, the two sides had already moved against each other. The collapsed buildings, the unsettled dust, the corpses of cavalry in pools of blood on the sides of the street, the blood trickling from the corner of Xu Shiji's lip, and three heavily injured cardinals were all proof of this.

The mood over the street was abnormally oppressive and tense. Even the warhorses could feel it, somewhat uneasily kicking their hooves.

The person who ultimately ended this standoff was someone nobody imagined.

The blood-covered Zhou Tong gasped out, "I'm still alive."

Yes, he was still alive, a matter that Chen Changsheng was utterly unwilling to accept, but one that both the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy were. This meant that there was still a buffer to move around in this matter.

Now, Zhou Tong himself had spoken.

A carriage came from the alley facing the street. Its curtain was raised, revealing Prince Chen Liu's face.

This handsome face was covered in concern, especially after it saw Chen Changsheng.

"I came to pick him up," Prince Chen Liu said to Xue Xingchuan, his eyes calm and fearless.

After a moment of silence, Xue Xingchuan slowly lowered his right hand, shot an expressionless glance at Chen Changsheng, then ordered his subordinates, "Escort Lord Zhou Tong back to the palace."

Hooves stamped once more like thunder, yet not as hair-raising as before. The cavalry of both the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy obeyed their respective orders and gradually retreated into the darkness on both ends of the street.

"I've added to everyone's troubles," Chen Changsheng said to Mao

Qiuyu. Then, with Prince Chen Liu's assistance, he entered the carriage.

Because of various problems with both the general situation and his mind, he currently did not want to get too close to the people from the Li Palace.

The breeze ruffled the curtain of the carriage, and he saw the alley of the Northern Military Department and that courtyard which he had never been able to see in the past, saw those Imperial Guards raise Zhou Tong onto a stretcher.

Zhou Tong's eyes were closed, his complexion dreadfully pale, his body covered in blood. He looked just like a dead man.

Even if the imperial physicians of the Imperial Palace could rescue him, the soul and body of this famously villainous official would always be missing a part. He was already a cripple.

But the frustrations on Chen Changsheng's brow still could not be wiped away.

"Were my actions not presumptuous, disregarding the general situation?" he asked Prince Chen Liu.

Prince Chen Liu extended a hand and patted him on the shoulder, soothing, "Zhou Tong is naturally no ordinary minister, but to the Empress, she would only use him if he's useful. If you had really killed him just now, would the Empress really have taken

vengeance for him? Would she stir up a war for him and kill the future Pope? Of course not."

In truth, he had not said all he wanted to say. In his view, if Chen Changsheng was the Empress's son, then his life was naturally more important than Zhou Tong's. No matter whether that rumor was true or not, even if the Empress wanted to kill Chen Changsheng, in her heart, Chen Changsheng's life was still one thousand, ten thousand times more important than Zhou Tong's.

Prince Chen Liu's gaze looked through the curtains at Zhou Tong on the stretcher and said in a heavy voice, "He's just a dog."

"Only a dead dog is a dog. As long as it's still alive, it's still a wolf."

Chen Changsheng recalled the words Zhexiu had once said to him and suddenly felt very tired. He said, "Tonight, I didn't truly kill him. I don't know if there'll be another chance in the future."

He was well aware that at least he would not have another chance to kill Zhou Tong.

"A person like Zhou Tong is naturally difficult to kill. For you to force him into such a state is already very outstanding."

As a member of the Imperial clan, it was impossible for Prince Chen Liu to feel any sort of positivity towards Zhou Tong. He wanted more than anyone else for Zhou Tong to die, so he was more grateful than anyone else for what Chen Changsheng did

tonight.

"I deeply admire you," he said to Chen Changsheng.

Thinking of tonight's turmoil in the capital and the tense situation on the street just a moment ago, Prince Chen Liu had grown much more solemn. He had appeared on the long street and was now sitting in the same carriage as Chen Changsheng, escorted away under the protection of the Orthodoxy cavalry. This was tantamount to proclaiming to the capital and to the Divine Empress where he stood.

Chen Changsheng did not feel there was anything worth admiring about him.

Because he still had not killed Zhou Tong.

In the Orthodox Academy, Zhexiu had once said that after killing Zhou Tong, he would go to Mount Li to pick up Qi Jian. At the time, Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six, and all the others felt this to be an impossible task.

An important figure like Zhou Tong was naturally difficult, but tonight, he had truly been on the verge of success, if not for the fact that he had been blocked by that patch of darkness.

If not for that voice that had come from the deepest depths of the darkness and resounded directly in his sea of consciousness.

It was a very familiar voice and also a voice he had not heard for a very long time.

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Back when the darkness had enveloped the courtyard, only Chen Changsheng and Zhou Tong were there.

Chen Changsheng had heard that voice, and so had Zhou Tong.

At the time, he believed it to be an illusion created when he was at death's door.

The darkness was deep and quiet, cold and chilly. He did not want to die, because death was an even deeper, quieter, and colder abyss.

In that moment when he was closest to death, all of his sinister and terrifying shell was completely shattered, leaving only the malicious, petty, timid him.

After confirming that the voice was real, he agreed without hesitation to that person's conditions.

As expected, that patch of darkness had safeguarded his life, yet he could not feel the slightest warmth over this fact, but actually

felt even colder.

The common people all said that Zhou Tong and the Demon Military Advisor Black Robe were equally famous as schemers, but upon hearing that person's voice he realized that those words were just a joke.

Before that person concealed in the depths of the darkness, what right did he have to call himself a schemer, how could he be considered cold and emotionless? In the eyes of that person, he was probably just a dog.

A dog that still had some use.

But even if he really was a dog, he still wanted to live.

Even if he had to wag his tail in pity and give a sorrowful look to the entire world, he still wanted to live.

Thinking of these things, his mind grew more agitated and Zhou Tong, no longer able to resist the onslaught of his injuries, fell unconscious.

Under the personal escort of Divine Generals Xue Xingchuan and Xu Shiji, the heavily wounded Zhou Tong was brought into the Imperial Palace.

Only this way, only in this place, could his survival be ensured.

The news that Zhou Tong was heavily injured had most likely already spread. In the darkness of the capital, it was impossible to know how many people wanted Zhou Tong dead.

Just like the situation Su Li encountered on his journey back south.

Watching Zhou Tong on the bed, gasping his dying breaths, his injuries an awful spectacle, Xue Xingchuan and Xu Shiji remained silent for a very long time, never speaking once.

They did not know what to say.

Just how had Chen Changsheng managed to do it?

The terrifying and miserable blade wound stretching from the left side of Zhou Tong's face to below his rib was fully exposed under the lantern light, a ghastly sight.

Xue Xingchuan and Xu Shiji both thought they understood what sort of person Chen Changsheng was, especially the latter, but neither of them could have imagined that he would possess such a valiant side.

A master of the Sacred Light serving the Imperial Court arrived, along with the best imperial physician in the palace. The chief eunuch also came, representing the Divine Empress.

Even after the treatment concluded and it was confirmed that Zhou Tong would be able to preserve his life, the Empress did not appear.

"I'll go first to handle some matters."

Xu Shiji seemed to be affected by something, his complexion rather unsightly as he left the Imperial City.

Xue Xingchuan did not leave. He carefully cleaned Zhou Tong's wounds and then moved over a chair to sit right in the middle of the palace hall's main entrance.

He closed his eyes, his spear sitting across his knees.

Anyone who wanted to kill Zhou Tong had to kill him first.

Because he was Zhou Tong's sole friend in this world.

In this world, Zhou Tong only had this one friend.

If even he left Zhou Tong, then Zhou Tong would truly be alone.

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The whole world knew that Xue Xingchuan was Zhou Tong's only friend.

This was a matter that the people of the world could never understand, even after puzzling over it for several decades.

Xue Xingchuan was the second-ranked Divine General of the continent. With Han Qing guarding the mausoleum for several centuries, he was the actual leader of the Divine Generals. Whether it was his cultivation, his military success, or his achievements in the north, he could take on this great reputation without the slightest shame. It was even said that he and Wang Po were the two candidates with the greatest hope of breaking past that threshold and entering the Divine Domain.

And he had a good reputation for running both his armies and his family strictly, yet he was friends with the notorious Zhou Tong. In the past some person had speculated that this might have been because of the Divine Empress. However, the other Divine Generals loyal to the Divine Empress, although fearful of Zhou Tong, had never acted friendly towards him of their own accord, nor even looked at him with good expressions.

No person knew why this friendship existed.

The medical skills of the Imperial Palace's physician were truly superb, and the Sacred Light had also played a very important role. Zhou Tong had suffered such severe injuries, but in a short time, he actually woke up.

Xue Xingchuan stood up and returned to the bed, saying to the dreadfully pale face, "Don't rush to speak, recovering from your wounds takes priority."

Zhou Tong ignored his advice, saying with a feeble voice, "Am I not right now very much like a dog?"

Chapter 624 – Brothers

At this time, half of Zhou Tong's shoulder and an arm had been cut off by Chen Changsheng's blade, and he was even blind in one eye. If he was a dog, he was certainly a stray one.

Xue Xingchuan creased his brow, replying, "Just calm your mind and focus on recovering."

Zhou Tong continued to ignore his advice. With great effort, he turned his neck to look at the entrance of the hall. Seeing the chair, he knew that Xue Xingchuan had been keeping watch from that place, and he fell silent for a very long time.

Then he asked, "Did the Empress come?"

The many stars in the night sky were bright and the starlight spilling onto the ground outside the hall was like water, peaceful and quiet.

After a pause, Xue Xingchuan said, "You know as well, the situation in the capital tonight is rather tense. The Empress must focus on the movements of the Li Palace."

"Is that so?" Zhou Tong squinted his eyes like an old dog, the pain from his left eye causing him to crease his brow. His voice also trembled as he spoke, "Then...did the Empress say anything?"

This time, Xue Xingchuan was quiet for a very long time, not

answering the question.

Zhou Tong perked up the corner of his lip, revealing an ugly and even somewhat horrifying smile, looking at him and saying, "You see, I truly am like a dog. Even when I'm about to die, the master won't care too much."

Xue Xingchuan remained silent for a few moments before saying, "When we were young, I said to you that you didn't need to live this way."

He was clearly heavily injured, yet Zhou Tong somehow managed to draw up the energy to bitterly say, "If I wasn't this way, could I be like you then?"

Xue Xingchuan fell silent once more.

"From the moment we came out of the womb, I couldn't surpass you. When you were born, you were no less than eight catties and eight taels. And me? I didn't even weight five catties. That's fine, and in any case, the family was poor, so no matter what, that's how I would be raised, but the main wife of the Xue clan couldn't give birth to a son, so she wanted to secretly take one to raise and found our family...if it were me, I would also choose a white fatty like you and not a thin monkey like me."

Zhou Tong continued, "Later on, the main wife of the Xue clan gave birth and decided to pass the clan to her own son. Afraid that you would complain, she secretly told you of this matter before dying. I admit that at the time, you treated Father and Mother

well, treated me even better. You brought me together with you to school and to study, but you never thought, for what reason should I pretend to be your attendant when together with you?"

Xue Xingchuan replied, "In front of other people, there was nothing I could do, but in the house, I always treated you as a brother."

Zhou Tong mocked, "But that's just when nobody was around. In front of others, I could only watch as you and Xue He showed each other the love and respect only brothers could. You tell me, what should I have felt?"

Xue Xingchuan fell silent, no longer speaking.

"I was born with an inherent weakness so that I couldn't even keep up with you in cultivation talent. If I hadn't entered the Department for Purging Officials and encountered that old ghost in the prison who taught me the Great Crimson Gown secret technique, and then also raided so many mansions to plunder techniques, how could I have possibly cultivated to my current level? How could I have caught up to you?"

Zhou Tong expressionlessly stared at the roof of the hall and continued, "But there is a problem with the Great Crimson Gown secret technique and my later cultivation was too messy, so I have no hope of taking that next step for the rest of this life while you are walking towards that place, step by step. I just don't understand; we're both twins, so why is there is such a big difference in our fortunes?"

"After many years, when I met you in the capital once more, I didn't expect for you to have already entered the Department for Purging Officials...but even at that point, if you began to change, it still wouldn't have been too late."

"Not too late to do what? If I did not give my life to the Empress, if I did not kill for the Empress, I would lose the Empress's favor and be killed by those people."

"Be at ease, the Empress will make arrangements for you," Xue Xingchuan comforted.

But within the depths of his heart, not even he believed those words.

Just then, the sound of footsteps could be heard outside the hall. It was not the Divine Empress, but a medical official delivering medicine.

After undergoing a careful inspection, the medical official carefully brought to the bed a wooden tray with a bowl of medicinal soup on it.

From the moment those footsteps could be heard, Zhou Tong had kept his eye upon this medical official, his sole eye shining with a peculiarly harsh light. Xue Xingchuan knew what he was thinking, what sort of disappointment, even despair, he was feeling, yet he was powerless to soothe him. He took the bowl of medicinal broth from the medical official and used the other hand to prop Zhou

Tong up, preparing to feed him the soup.

Zhou Tong gazed at the black medicinal broth within the bowl, sensed the sacred Qi and medicinal fragrances within, and the look on his face suddenly became rather strange.

"What's wrong?" Xue Xingchuan asked.

Zhou Tong's voice trembled with an indescribable fear. "I...am not at ease."

"There's no need for that." Xue Xingchuan knew what he was worried about, saying seriously to him, "The Empress is not that sort of person."

"I've done more for the Empress than the rest of you added together, and so I know the Empress better than the rest of you. In any case, I am not at ease."

Zhou Tong's voice grew sharper, but because he was somewhat lacking in breath due to his injuries, his voice was also like a broken bellows, gasping and wheezing.

At the moment, he looked just like a stubborn child who, because he didn't like bitter medicines, turned his face away and tightly shut his mouth, refusing to drink the medicine even if he was beaten to death.

Xue Xingchuan looked at Zhou Tong, remembering how many

years ago in their old home, he also refused to eat medicine in the same way, and he couldn't help but reveal a smile of nostalgia on his face.

Once these matters in the capital were concluded, he would have someone send Zhou Tong back to their old home to retire. He believed that besides the Empress, himself, and Xue He, no one would imagine that Zhou Tong would be there.

As Xue Xingchuan thought of these things, he raised up the bowl of medicine and took a sip, saying, "You see, there's nothing wrong with the medicine, and it's not bitter either."

Many years ago, when he was coaxing Zhou Tong into drinking medicine, he had done the same, drinking the medicine for him first.

Seeing this scene, Zhou Tong suddenly began to cry, sounds of weeping coming from his throat.

Xue Xingchuan was also somewhat moved.

After crying, Zhou Tong felt even more exhausted, but he had also greatly relaxed.

He looked at Xue Xingchuan and struggled out a smile. "I've thought it through. As long as I live, it's fine."

Xue Xingchuan was greatly comforted, replying, "As long as

you've thought it through, it's fine."

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By the time the carriage returned to the Orthodox Academy, it had already been surrounded by guards.

The soldiers of the Imperial Court and the cavalry of the Orthodoxy extended from the main street into Hundred Flowers Lane and then around the academy walls, their cordon so tight that not even a trickle of water could seep through.

Chen Changsheng descended from the carriage and said goodbye to Prince Chen Liu. Under countless gazes, he walked into the Orthodox Academy.

The academy gate of the Orthodox Academy was pushed open. Within, it was brightly lit by lanterns. Although it was late night, none of the several hundred teachers or students could sleep because tonight, no one could sleep.

The sword array formed by the South Stream Temple disciples had already been moved from around the house to behind the academy gate. Sensing the awe-inspiring sword intent, one could have confidence that if the troops of the Imperial Court wished to charge through, they would certainly pay a miserable and heavy price. Yet for some reason, none of the usual composure or self-

confidence could be seen on those female disciples, but rather anxiety.

"Where did you go?" Tang Thirty-Six looked at Chen Changsheng and asked.

The teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy were also looking at him.

Chen Changsheng had left the Orthodox Academy four hours ago. He had gone to the space under New North Bridge, gone to the Plum Garden Inn, and finally, to the alley of the Northern Military Department. He had done many things.

Because of his departure, the situation in the capital had suddenly grown tense, and the Orthodoxy cavalry and then the Imperial Guards had come to this place. The people within the Orthodox Academy naturally knew that something had happened, just not what. The battle at the alley of the Northern Military Department had just concluded, and while Tang Thirty-Six had people in the capital, the transmission of this news had not traveled faster than Chen Changsheng's return.

"It's nothing, everyone should go to sleep."

Chen Changsheng indicated that Su Moyu should take the teachers and students to rest, then he brought Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu to the house.

The sword array of South Stream Temple naturally moved with him, taking not even a few moments to move to the lake shore. Su Moyu also quickly returned.

"There's truly nothing wrong?" Tang Thirty-Six looked into his eyes and very solemnly asked.

They knew the state of Chen Changsheng's body and could not treat him with the usual teasing and fearlessness. They had originally thought that after leaving the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng would not come back. They certainly had not imagined that he would return at such a late hour. This made them feel much more at ease, yet they could not completely relax.

"There's truly nothing," Chen Changsheng replied. "I just went to take care of a few things."

"What things?"

"I...went to kill Zhou Tong."

Hearing this, the house instantly became incomparably silent.

The breeze blew against the great banyan tree, yet it could not rustle its leaves. It blew against the surface of the lake, yet no ripple could be seen.

Everyone was stunned, especially those young girls of South Stream Temple.

The capital tonight was immersed in an abnormal atmosphere with many signs of a coming storm to be found. Zhexiu and the rest had guessed it had something to do with Chen Changsheng, yet they not expected it to be a major concern like this.

This world contained innumerable people that wanted Zhou Tong dead, but would any of them dare to bring these wants into reality?

Su Moyu gazed at him with a look of admiration.

Those girls of South Stream Temple looked at him with suddenly bright eyes, thinking, he truly deserves to be the man the temple master loves, he's really extraordinary.

"I said before, Zhou Tong is mine to kill."

Zhexiu looked at him and continued, "But seeing your unique situation, I won't blame you."

Chen Changsheng looked back at him and said, "You were imprisoned in Zhou Prison because of your relationship with me and the Orthodox Academy, so I felt that I at least had to settle this matter before leaving."

Leaving? To where? Upon hearing these words, the girls of South Stream Temple were filled with confusion and doubt.

Tang Thirty-Six and Su Moyu knew the meaning of the word 'leaving'. The mood that just seemed to be warming up instantly chilled once more.

"I said before, it's fine if you add money," Zhexiu answered.

Chen Changsheng did not continue to argue with him over this matter, saying, "I'm sorry, I wasn't able to kill him."

A voice came from the South Stream Temple disciples, "Daring to kill is already very extraordinary."

The speaker was Ye Xiaolian, once a worshipper of Qiushan Jun, later a worshipper of Chen Changsheng, and now a worshipper of Xu Yourong.

Tonight, she suddenly felt that liking Chen Changsheng was a very reasonable matter.

Chen Changsheng noticed that the mood of the South Stream Temple disciples was rather peculiar, so he asked, "What's happened?"

Ye Xiaolian somewhat uneasily answered, "The temple master still hasn't come back."

Chen Changsheng thought this over and then offered, "Perhaps she decided to stay in the Imperial Palace?"

Ye Xiaolian shook her head. "The temple master stated that she would definitely return after dark. If she did not return..."

Hearing this, Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six and the others finally felt that something was wrong, their expressions turning solemn.

Chapter 625 – Pure Or Turbid, Virtuous Or Foolish, Who Decides?

"The Holy Maiden said that if she did not return, she would have to trouble Little Principal Chen to temporarily lead us."

The female disciples of South Stream Temple seriously bowed to Chen Changsheng, their white dresses slightly drifting in the breeze.

"There's no need to worry. The Divine Empress regards her as her own daughter, and His Holiness, out of regard for you, won't do anything to her."

After returning to the house, Tang Thirty-Six attempted to ease Chen Changsheng's anxiety.

Chen Changsheng truly did understand this reasoning, but why had Yourong given this sort of order to the South Stream Temple disciples before entering the Imperial Palace? Could it be that she knew that it would be very difficult for her to leave the Imperial Palace after entering? Why? What did she want to do in the Imperial Palace? Was she still in there?

He took the sheath from his waist and took out a suit of flexible armor. Throwing it in front of Tang Thirty-Six, he said, "Remember to send this to Scholartree Manor for me. Give it to Wang Po."

This flexible armor was covered in blood, as well as both deep and shallow sword slashes. There was also an extremely tiny sword hole. Only the ties of the armor were cut, so it should be easy to fix.

Su Moyu and Zhexiu did not know what this flexible armor was or why Chen Changsheng wanted to especially send it to Scholartree Manor and gift it to Wang Po.

The Tang clan was the wealthiest in the world, so Tang Thirty-Six's gaze was naturally different from others. Hearing the words 'Scholartree Manor' and 'Wang Po', he very quickly guessed at something.

"This is the Six Protections Divine Armor?" He picked up the flexible armor from the ground and looked at Chen Changsheng in shock.

Su Moyu and Zhexiu froze.

"Yeah, this was originally the Wang clan's, so it's best to return it to Wang Po. He will probably be very happy."

Chen Changsheng then took out a bronze mirror and handed it over, saying, "I don't know what this is, but it should be something good. If my guess isn't wrong, it should be able to control the Orthodoxy's power of light."

This bronze mirror was probably the one Zhou Tong had prepared to deal with the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff. In the battle, it

had not shown much use, but to remain undamaged under the Halving Blade made it rather interesting to him.

Tang Thirty-Six took the mirror and gasped, "The Mirror of Pure Virtue?"

Chen Changsheng only knew that the Li Palace had a Hall of Pure Virtue, but he did not know that there was a bronze mirror in this world that shared the same name.

Zhexiu arched his brows and Su Moyu could no longer hold himself back. Walking over to Tang Thirty-Six, he took the mirror and used his sleeve to carefully wipe the blood off its surface.

"Is this mirror famous?" Chen Changsheng asked.

"You've never looked at the Tier of Legendary Weapons?" Tang Thirty-Six countered. "Its position there is even higher than your Stainless Sword!"

Chen Changsheng was surprised, thinking, at the time when I was slashing down with a kitchen knife, I didn't see anything amazing about this mirror.

"Just what did you go there for? To kill Zhou Tong or to rob him?"

Tang Thirty-Six carried the Six Protections Divine Armor and walked up to him, quite perplexed. "You only went for such a short

amount of time, so how did you come back with two items on the Tier of Legendary Weapons?"

Chen Changsheng explained, "These were all things Zhou Tong was carrying. When I was killing him, I just took them with me."

In the following pause, Zhexiu and the other two all glanced at each other.

After learning that Chen Changsheng had gone to kill Zhou Tong, they were extremely shocked, but they didn't ask about too many of the details. This was because they had never believed that Chen Changsheng could really accomplish this task, and were even expecting for Chen Changsheng to soon after admit his defeat. But if he really was no match for Zhou Tong and relied on the protection of the Orthodoxy's powerful figures to return, how had he obtained these two treasures from Zhou Tong?

They turned to Chen Changsheng, awaiting his explanation. Chen Changsheng narrated what had occurred in the alley of the Northern Military Department, but he did not give many specific details.

"You actually won?" Tang Thirty-Six stared at him like he was a monster.

Chen Changsheng replied, "Since what I was fighting for was life or death, victory or defeat has no meaning."

Tang Thirty-Six said in shock, "But in the end, you still won."

Chen Changsheng ignored him, saying, "See how to deal with this bronze mirror. If none of you want it, then it's fine to leave it in the Orthodox Academy as school property."

Tang Thirty-Six was displeased at these words. "A matter like last words is fine if you communicate just once, or is it that you insist on constantly reminding us that you're going to die soon?"

Chen Changsheng thought this over and then answered, "These aren't last words, this is a question of inheritance."

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In the view of many, the palace hall in the deepest depths of the Li Palace was unfitting of the Pope's status. This was because this hall had too many eaves that cut up the sky into a well—perhaps this was the origin of the term 'sky well'? But there were some benefits. Standing here in the courtyard and gazing up, one would often be able to see a very tidily cut out sky of stars, very beautiful to see.

The night gradually deepened, and the darkness followed suit, seeming like an invisible cloud that covered up the stars of the night sky. Not even the slightly chilly breeze of the early autumn was able to drive away this darkness. From the deepest depths of

the darkness came a voice, very calm and indifferent, carrying a feeling of nostalgia and the weathering of time. Yet it also had another feeling, the feeling that this nostalgia and weathering of time were placed intentionally so that they could be heard.

"It's already been almost twenty years since I've seen the night sky here."

Just like many other people in the capital, the Pope was not asleep. He had just finished watering the Green Leaf and was using a towel to carefully wipe beads of water off the leaves. Hearing the voice coming from the darkness outside the hall, his hands stopped as he slowly turned his body.

"If your actions back then had not been so impatient, perhaps that story from twenty years ago would not have happened."

The Pope spoke to the depths of the darkness.

The person in the darkness replied, "Or perhaps it was just because I did not expect that at the time, you would ultimately stand at her side."

The wrinkles on the Pope's face seemed to deepen somewhat upon hearing this statement. He slowly replied, "These are all matters of the past."

The voice in the darkness replied, "Yes, all matters of the past. We should be discussing matters of the present, matters of

tonight."

The Pope placed the towel by the Green Leaf pot and walked to the stone steps outside the hall. Gazing at the darkness, he said, "Even now, I'm still not clear on what exactly you want to do."

The chilly night breeze blew across his hempen robe, seeming to want to drift away and depart this world.

Yet the voice in the darkness seemed to sink down, as firm and indestructible as metal. "I have always made clear what I wanted to do, but back then, you did not agree with my view. Now twenty years have passed and you know that your judgment back then was wrong, so you must stand on my side."

Hearing this, the Pope lowered his head and gazed at the shadows on the stone steps, sinking into a very long silence.

"Tianhai possesses the best blood and talent, possesses the best position, but she is a woman—her vision and structure have a limit, there is a problem with her personality. The past two hundred years have long since proved this. If she continues to sit on the imperial throne of the Great Zhou, even if the confluence of the north and south smoothly proceeds, the humans will still be unable to defeat the demons under her leadership."

A wind rustled the trees outside the hall. The Green Leaf within the hall and the light leaking out of the magnificent and grand Great Hall of Light all seemed to waver.

This was because the person within the darkness spoke once more, the voice growing colder and more certain.

"Do you want the people of the country to be exterminated? Do you really want the bloodline of the Chen Imperial clan to be left homeless and destitute, to wither away by the day until their line comes to an end? Back then when we parted in the Orthodox Academy, we already agreed, I am responsible for preserving the bloodline of the Imperial clan while you will remain in the capital to watch her for a while. A period of twenty years has gone just like that; could it be that you have already forgotten what you thought back then, grown intoxicated in her structure of two Saints ruling the world together? No, I've watched you for ten-odd years from Xining Village with apathetic eyes, but I will not allow you to deteriorate like this. Now that the time has come to put the cards on the table, I will not allow you to remain in this lifeless palace hall, covering your eyes and pretending that you can't see all the chaos in this world."

The Pope lowered his head to gaze at the faint shadows cast by the eaves, silent once more for a very long time.

After this seemingly interminable time, he raised his head to the depths of the darkness and asked, "Just where does your confidence come from?"

The person in the darkness answered, "No person can resist that allure. The ripe fruit is right on the branch, waiting for her to pick it."

The Pope replied, "That child said to me that those who are not

Saints cannot resist it, but she has always been a Saint."

"The so-called Saints of the present world are naught but jokes. How could such a greedy and shameless woman like her truly understand the divine principles? If she were sure that by eating this fruit, she could perfect her defying of the heavens and changing of fate, thus allowing her to enter that grand realm above Concealed Divinity, do you think she could resist? Do you know of how much pain I endured on that night when he was ten and his fragrance spread in all directions? If that greedy and stupid Golden Dragon had not once more risked degenerating to descend upon the world and I had not had to go to the Cloud Grave to fight him, perhaps I would have eaten him on the spot!"

The voice of the person in the darkness became cold and cruel. "Let alone the fact that in her view, this is what she requires to complete her changing of fate, the Heavenly Dao's most heartless demand. The fruit that fell from her body will ultimately be eaten by her—how could there be a more perfect cycle of the Heavenly Dao? I can't see through it, so how could she?"

The Pope's voice became rather tired, filled with a guilt that was impossible to easily dispel. "In the end, you still succeeded in deceiving me, and also in deceiving Mei Lisha. In that letter of yours, you never said that this matter would require someone to make a sacrifice, let alone that he would be the one to make it."

"When a fruit is ripe, it must be eaten, whether it's poisonous or not."

"At the very beginning, I thought that by having the fruit ripen as

quickly as possible, it could be quickly planted into fertile ground so that we could assist it in growing into a tree that reached into the heavens."

"Once a fruit has ripened, if it is not eaten, it can only rot away. In any case, that child will die. His fate of certain death in exchange for such a great benefit to all of humanity? What problem is there with that?"

"But that child knows nothing about this."

"Every person has their own agenda, but not every person has the ability to make their own decision about their fate, the power to make their own choice."

"Could it be that only you have the right to make choices?"

"Because I can offer to you and this world the best choice..."

"Do you know what sort of choice I and this world require?"

"Mei Lisha wholeheartedly desired the Imperial clan to return to power; you only care about the continuation of humanity. He is Tianhai and Emperor Xian's son, so nobody will oppose him. And please, believe in me. He is truly this continent's most intelligent and most extraordinary youth. He is the most suitable successor to the Great Zhou imperial throne and also the most suitable candidate for the future leader of humanity."

"But that child is your disciple."

The voice in the darkness vanished for a very long time, and then finally spoke once more.

"But he is first a member of the Imperial clan. From the moment he began his existence in this world, he carried the responsibility of continuing the Imperial clan, the duty to shed blood for the Imperial clan."

Chapter 626 – Yu Ren Within The Mausoleum Of Books

The Pope gazed deep into the darkness, saying, "This is sending him to his death."

The person in the darkness indifferently replied, "What does his death count for? At the time, so many members of the Imperial clan died."

The Pope was quiet for a very long time, the sea of stars deep within his eyes gradually growing calm. "You are not of the Imperial clan, so why have you never been able to let these matters go?"

The voice in the darkness was calm and firm. "This is His Majesty's unfulfilled wish."

The Pope knew that the 'His Majesty' here naturally did not refer to Emperor Xian, but that most extraordinary sovereign throughout the ages: His Majesty Emperor Taizong.

This conversation began many years ago with a letter sent to the capital from Xining Village.

This argument began two years ago when that youth called Chen Changsheng entered the neglected grounds of the Orthodox Academy.

It seemed that they would both end in tonight's conversation.

But even at this moment, the Pope had still not confirmed his intentions. Just like the Green Leaf in that pot, he swayed lightly back and forth with the wind.

This did not mean that he had no position of his own, that his Dao heart was not firm enough. On the contrary, it was precisely because he had to consider too many things, matters spanning the entire world and considered in the most meticulous detail, so it was very difficult to make his decision.

"Besides me, no one else knows that you are the most skilled at the Scroll of Time, the Canon of Flowing West."

There seemed to be a gaze in the darkness, falling on that small pool within the hall and also the wooden ladle sitting by it.

The person said to the Pope, "You are the clear waters murmuring as they flow west. Although having flowed for one thousand years, you are still not stained by a single grain of dust or filth, but so clear that the bottom can be seen, a serene and gentle, yet boundless divine might. And so...you do not need to make a decision. At the final moment, you will eventually discover where your heart lies."

After saying this, the voice in the darkness spoke no more.

The Pope stood on the stone steps, gazing at the shadows cast by

the eaves, standing before the sound of flowing water, his clothes swaying in the gentle breeze like a green leaf.

"Senior, you cultivate the way of following your heart, so you are so sure that my heart will follow yours?"

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After leaving Xining Village, Yu Ren had followed his master to many places, but whether it was the snowy plains near Mount Han or the wilderness below Snowhold Pass, he didn't like it too much because there were too few people. The White Emperor City on the shore of the Red River also did not leave too deep an impression on him, except that when he heard that the demi-human princess was his junior brother's student, he grew somewhat happy.

His mood in the past few days had not been bad, but not at all because this was the capital, his hometown.

He was raised from childhood by his master, and only had faint recollections from when he was small, the memories having long since grown indistinct. His master said that he was a person of the capital, that he had lived here before, but he couldn't remember where the house he came from was. Moreover, he did not like the capital. Different from the reason he disliked the snowy plains and the wilderness, he thought the capital had too many people.

The capital had too many people, the snowy plains and the wilderness had too few. Xining Village was the best, as it had neither too many nor too few people.

He did not know why his master had brought him to so many places, why they had come to the capital. He was only worried about his junior brother's body and wanted to go see him, but after his master had brought him to the Mausoleum of Books, he had vanished. He also instructed him not to leave the Mausoleum of Books and said that in a few days, he would naturally be able to meet his junior brother.

As he watched his master disappear, he thought, feeling that this was also fine. No matter what matters his junior brother encountered, with his master present, they could all be resolved. In addition, there were far too many people in the capital and he truly did not like it. There were not too many or too few people in the Mausoleum of Books, and there were green trees and flowing waters. It was very easy for him to be reminded of that mountain behind Xining Village, that stream, and those happy days of memorizing the Daoist Canon with his junior brother and catching fish to eat. When he heard about when his junior brother had brought down a sky filled with starlight on his first time comprehending the monoliths, he became very proud and happy. As a result, he had even more reasons to like this place.

There was also another important reason: in the Mausoleum of Books, he could see the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. He had become well-versed in the Daoist Canon, in the three thousand scriptures of the Great Dao, and had fused them all together except the final one. Although he was like Chen Changsheng, his master never having taught him how to cultivate, he had a naturally intimate

feeling towards the Heavenly Tome Monoliths that contained Daoist techniques and laws. He wanted to see if there was anything interesting within them.

Before leaving the Mausoleum of Books, his master had ordered him not to leave, but he didn't say anything about not seeing the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. He prepared two days of food in the small courtyard, stood by the fence with the aid of his crutch and watched the fluctuations in the sunlight twice, and after feeling that there were no problems, brought his packed food and walked into the plum trees, following the mountain path into the mausoleum.

It was still a long time to the Grand Examination, and because of last year's opening of the Garden of Zhou, the Boiling Stone Summit, and the many unforeseen events that followed, the monolith viewers within the Mausoleum of Books had successively taken their leave. The cultivators that remained within were much fewer than in the past. He walked for a long time on the mountain but failed to encounter a single person, all the way until he reached the first monolith hut.

In front of this monolith hut, he encountered a Monolith Guardian called Ji Jin. This Monolith Guardian had a very gentle personality, carrying a detachment and sense of ease that came from thoroughly understanding worldly things. He gave Yu Ren a very good feeling, and he thought to himself, the Mausoleum of Books is truly a holy land of cultivation. After viewing the monoliths for a long time, could it be that everyone will see such an advancement in temperament?

The Monolith Guardian called Ji Jin asked him which sect he was a disciple of and why he had entered the Mausoleum of Books to comprehend the Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

Yu Ren did not know how to answer, but it didn't matter as he was unable to speak anyway. He leaned his stick against the hut and used his hand to make a few gestures, though he did not know if the other party would be able to understand.

Ji Jin could not understand his sign language, but he could clearly see that Yu Ren was handicapped. His heart was filled with sympathy and he asked no more questions. He even warned that when viewing the monoliths, one should not force it, and that he should focus on resting.

Watching the Monolith Guardian leave along the mountain path, Yu Ren wiped the cold sweat off his forehead, his eyes revealing a content smile. He thought to himself, Junior Brother spoke wrongly when he said I am unable to deceive people. It's just that in Xining Village, I didn't need to trick anyone. You see, at this time, I successfully deceived a senior.

The first Heavenly Tome Monolith of the Mausoleum of Books was the Reflecting Monolith.

Yu Ren dragged his leg and slowly walked before the monolith. He looked over, somewhat curious, somewhat excited, even unable to resist the urge to stretch out his hand and caress it. He felt that this Heavenly Tome Monolith was truly very interesting. The poem written by that worthy predecessor was truly excellent. The feeling of his fingers against the monolith was truly very

comfortable, cool and icy, just like the stream in that mountain behind Xining Village.

Then, he came to the second Heavenly Tome Monolith.

This Heavenly Tome Monolith was also very interesting, and he examined it with great excitement. He felt that those lines were so beautiful, they were just like the rays of light in the autumn back in the mountain behind Xining Village, cut apart by the tree leaves.

Then, he came to the third Heavenly Tome Monolith.

This Heavenly Tome Monolith was even more interesting. The traces on the monolith were still clear, the lines still beautiful, yet they were not as complex as the previous two monoliths. In his eyes, they became an extremely simple line.

Simple did not mean that it was not beautiful, did not mean that it was easy to understand. It was just like Xining Village in the rainy season, the lines of water sliding down from the eaves of the old temple and the marks left by the dancing yellow leaves that had been knocked down by the rain. In order to make clear the law behind these marks, Yu Ren needed to use somewhat more time, even putting his walking stick to the side and sitting to think for a while.

Then, it was the fourth Heavenly Tome Monolith.

The fifth Heavenly Tome Monolith.

The sixth.

The seventh.

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Some time passed.

Yu Ren had reached a monolith hut. Leaning on his walking stick and slightly tilting his head, he examined this monolith, finding it rather strange.

Because this monolith was severed, the original monolith now in some other place.

He had no idea it had been cut apart by a man called Zhou Dufu. With this broken monolith as a boundary, the Heavenly Tome Monoliths he had viewed were called the front mausoleum.

He knew that last year, his junior brother had viewed the monoliths of the Mausoleum of Books very smoothly, making him very proud, but he did not know of the fact that he had viewed all the monoliths of the front mausoleum in a single day.

He raised his head to glance at the sky and discovered that the

sun had not reached its zenith. The weather wasn't too hot, so he decided to continue.

From the time he had entered the Mausoleum of Books to now, not even half a day had passed.

How to view the broken monolith? He also did not know.

He slowly walked up to the broken monolith and extended a hand to feel its shorn edge.

After a few moments, he drew back his fingers, deep in thought. He looked around and saw that he was still in front of the broken monolith.

He changed the side of his walking stick, using his stump of an arm to hold it. His now emptied right hand scratched his itchy back. He was somewhat confused, and posed himself the question, "How should I continue?"

The autumn winds gently blew through the mountain mausoleum, carrying along the Daoist robe washed so many times it had lost color and lifting up that lock of black hair on his forehead, revealing his eye.

He had one eye that could not see things, but he did not know if it could see anything else.

He walked into the forest behind the monolith hut. Using his

hand to push away the somewhat prickly grass, he curiously looked inside.

There was an indistinct path there, most likely stamped out by feet. It was on the verge of being covered by grass, meaning it had most likely been many years since it had last been traversed.

Seeing the unsteady trail, Yu Ren's face revealed an awkward expression. However, after thinking it over, he still took up his walking stick and hobbled onto the trail.

The grass gradually swallowed his figure, and the abandoned trail gradually extended under his feet and stick.

After some time, he finally exited the woods and arrived at another monolith hut.

He raised his arm and used his sleeve to wipe the sweat off his face, feeling his face rather hot. He thought to himself, fortunately I didn't get lost, or else I would be in trouble. I don't have any means of calling for help.

He walked under the monolith hut and began to view the monolith.

This place was no longer the front mausoleum.

Of the thirteen mausoleums of the Heavenly Tomes, he had already reached the second mausoleum.

After Zhou Dufu severed the monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books, he was the first to directly walk to this place.

He naturally did not know of this. He continued to view the monoliths, continued to advance, viewing monolith after monolith.

When he felt hungry, he would take a lunchbox from his bosom and eat. When he was thirsty, he would seek out some mountain river to drink from.

The food in the lunchbox was very simple. It was dried meat fried with green peppers.

He had found the dried meat hanging in the beams of the kitchen of some abandoned house while the green peppers had been picked from some vegetable field that no one took care of.

The sun set behind the mountains and the numerous stars appeared in the night sky. The sun rose up and the numerous stars retreated behind the light. The clear streams in the mountains slowly flowed by, just like time.

Days passed, and Yu Ren realized that his lunchbox was empty. Whether it was the dried meat fried with green peppers or the pickled tofu, not a single morsel remained.

He truly was rather hungry, thus he returned via his original

path. While passing those monolith huts, he finally encountered some other cultivators.

In these few days, he had seen nothing but silent forests and monoliths. Finally being able to see people made Yu Ren rather happy, so he nodded at these cultivators in greeting.

But those cultivators looked at him like he was a ghost.

Who was this person? How had they never seen him before? Why was he coming back from in front of them? Could it be that he had already seen the next Heavenly Tome Monolith?

Chapter 627 – Mother And Son (I)

Returning to the courtyard, Yu Ren made more food. After first eating his fill, he prepared several more lunchboxes and then walked once more into the Mausoleum of Books.

When he reached the straight path heading into the Mausoleum of Books, he suddenly changed his mind and turned right.

The weather was bright and sunny and the mountain mausoleum had many people. He had just met with them, and now if he were to meet them again, it would be a little too close. Moreover, if they met again, would that mean they were acquaintances? Or perhaps acquaintances that weren't acquainted with each other? Then if he were to just nod his head in greeting, might he be taken as lacking in courtesy?

These questions were very troublesome and Yu Ren was not very skilled in handling them, so he decided to enter the Mausoleum of Books through another path.

He had no idea of the saying known by the vast majority of this world's cultivators, that there was only one path into the Mausoleum of Books.

In the lush mountain forests, he made many attempts, but he still did not succeed. Because of the difficulties presented by his legs, he also fell a few times. His body was covered in grass and pine needles, making him look rather miserable.

He was somewhat helpless as he thought, how come I can't find another path?

Then, he saw a path on the mountain. This path was paved with white stones, like white jade under the sunlight.

This path was very straight and also extended straight towards the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

Yu Ren happily walked towards that path. When he got close, however, he felt rather strange, as there was not a single person on that mountain path.

This mountain was the straightest path in the Mausoleum of Books and was also the closest path, so why was no one walking it?

Could it be that the monolith viewers wanted to hone their wills and so deliberately did not take this shortcut?

Thinking of this possibility and then thinking about the happiness he had felt upon seeing the straight mountain path, Yu Ren felt somewhat ashamed.

But he glanced at his leg and thought to himself, in the end, I'm still different from the average person, so maybe taking the shortcut isn't too shameful an action?

Blushing somewhat, he leaned against his walking stick and walked towards the mountain path.

With his legs, crossing those clear and shallow canals was truly troublesome. After only walking up to the start of the mountain path, he felt somewhat tired. Thankfully, there was a pavilion here where he could rest for a while.

Walking under the pavilion, he saw a statue of bronze, covered all over in dust and rust. He thought, if Junior Brother saw this, he would feel very unwell.

This was referring to Chen Changsheng's obsession with cleanliness.

Yu Ren glanced at the ramrod-straight mountain path and thought to himself, it will definitely require a lot of energy to climb it, so it might be better to first rest and store up enough energy. Thus, he sat down by the bronze statue.

But he was somewhat uncomfortable. Since he had grown up together with Chen Changsheng, the two had influenced each other, and so he had a slight obsession with cleanliness as well.

He fell into thought, then took out a handkerchief from his sleeve. Walking to a small pool on the side, he lowered his body with difficulty and soaked the handkerchief. He returned to the bronze statue and began to carefully clean it.

He had just wiped the left arm of the bronze statue clean when he suddenly heard a voice come out of the statue's armor.

This voice was very low and not at all loud. It was unable to travel very far, but in his ears, it was like a clap of thunder.

"It's fine if you just wipe the helmet a bit."

The autumn wind rippled the clear waters in the canals and carried away the dust on the armor. The pavilion was extremely quiet.

Yu Ren stared at the bronze statue in a daze for a long time, thinking in shock, it's actually alive!

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When Chen Changsheng first entered the capital, he had no understanding of the world's common sense. Yu Ren had grown up with him, so he was also naturally awful in this aspect.

He did not know that this ramrod-straight mountain path was the Divine Path and that besides the Tianhai Divine Empress and the Pope, no person could step upon it.

He also did not know that this statue of a general under the pavilion was not a statue, but a real general, the number one Divine General of the continent who had guarded the mausoleum

for more than six centuries, Han Qing.

However, he at least now knew that this statue was a living person, and judging by the dust and rust on his armor, this person had probably been sitting here for a very long time.

To sit here for such a long time, could he not be bored? Yu Ren did not like dealing with other people, and was not skilled at dealing with them, but he asked himself honestly and concluded that if he couldn't see a single person for many years, he would still find it very dull. Besides that, there was still one very important question: this person had been eternally sitting here, so how did he eat?

Thinking of the question of eating, he subconsciously took out a lunchbox and placed it in front of the armor, gesturing to ask, is Sir hungry?

No voice came from the armor.

Yu Ren considered his options, then made a few more complex gestures, their meaning asking, what if I go and cook Sir a bowl of noodle soup?

A voice came from the armor. "Placing it here is fine. In addition, you cannot walk this Divine Path."

Yu Ren left the lunchbox on the ground, bowed, gave an unwilling glance at the Divine Path, then hobbled away with his

walking stick.

Not long after he left, the autumn wind once more descended over the shallow canals and pavilion, carrying away the dust in the chinks of the armor.

Two deep eyes, weathered by the vicissitudes of time, lit up within the depths of the helmet.

Han Qing opened his eyes.

Then, he closed his eyes.

A lunchbox was quietly placed on the ground before him.

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Following the original path and returning to the Heavenly Tome Monolith he did not know the number of, Yu Ren continued to view the monoliths.

Perhaps because this Heavenly Tome Monolith was too abstruse and difficult to understand, or perhaps because he was thinking about certain matters, he stood in front of this monolith for a very long time.

All the way until the dead of the night, he was still standing there.

He was somewhat hungry when a small drizzle began to fall from the night sky.

He moved into the monolith hut, took out the remaining lunchbox and placed it on the Heavenly Tome Monolith, and began to eat.

This rain was not copious, but the sound of it was rather vexing.

Yu Ren tidied up the lunchbox and leaned against the Heavenly Tome Monolith, looking out.

This place was already high up in the Mausoleum of Books. After his eyes pierced through the thin curtain of rain, he could see the lights of the capital.

Perhaps because it was too late at night, the lanterns of many houses were already extinguished, making the capital seem rather gloomy.

Yu Ren once more felt concerned over Chen Changsheng.

He believed that his master could assuredly resolve any problems his junior brother encountered, but what about his illness?

Suddenly, he sensed something and turned to a certain place in the darkness. He slightly creased his brow, not understanding what this feeling was.

There were no stars at that place, but a high platform.

The Dew Platform.

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There was a person on the Dew Platform.

The Tianhai Divine Empress clasped her hands behind her and stood on the edge of the platform, quietly gazing into the night sky.

Tonight, many clouds suddenly drifted over the capital, seeming like an even deeper darkness. It was naturally not possible to see the stars.

But that darkness and those clouds could not obstruct her eyes.

Just like how the light emitted by the Night Pearls and the drizzle descending from the sky could not stain her body.

Her beautiful face had a somewhat solemn expression because she could clearly sense that the Heavenly Dao had changed.

Was that fate?

Her Fated Star was high up in the distant sky, a faint shadow cast over it.

Perhaps because her other Fated Star was now in the capital.

This was the baneful star upon her fate.

What should she do?

Wave her sleeve to obscure that star's light?

But what use would that be?

If she really did do this, in the future, it would be very difficult to truly obtain victory over the Heavenly Dao.

But if she did not do this, could she obtain victory over the Heavenly Dao right now?

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Chen Changsheng knew that his time was growing short.

This time, it truly was growing short.

In order to kill Zhou Tong, he had paid dearly. His blood was at this very moment flowing into his internal organs, his meridians fractured into utter chaos. The layer of Sacred Light Xu Yourong had cast over his body was growing thinner and thinner, fainter and fainter. At any moment, he might send off to the world's beings a fantastic temptation, and at that moment, he might die.

How much time was left? One day or two days? One song or one cup of tea?

He had no second thoughts. Rising from the bed, he took out the Yellow Paper Umbrella and jumped out of the window.

Tang Thirty-Six, Zhexiu and the others had not slept. They were standing guard outside his room and in the trees, but they could not prevent him from leaving. Even if Zhexiu in the great banyan tree had sensed him leaving, he probably would have granted him his final freedom. As a wolf youth that had grown up in the desolate and bloody snowy plains, he knew that death should be a tranquil affair.

The drizzling rain landed upon the Yellow Paper Umbrella without a sound, a gentle and humid rain.

He propped up the umbrella and entered the dense forest by the lake, and then doubled back. It didn't take too long before he reached the outer wall.

Deep within the dense forest was a door that led directly to the Imperial Palace.

On this wall was a door that Luoluo had her subordinates construct.

However, he did not use either of these doors because he could not guarantee that the people within the Imperial Palace or the people sent by his martial uncle the Pope were not standing guard by these doors.

He glanced at the old walls completely covered in moss and lightly jumped over.

After this year's spring winds and autumn rains, the Hundred Herb Garden that had once been completely plundered by him and Tang Thirty-Six was now brimming with life once more. Many precious medicinal herbs and spirit fruits quietly watched him from their orchards and branches, waiting for him to pick them. However, he displayed a single-minded focus and ventured further in.

His final destination was the Imperial Palace.

He wanted to confirm Xu Yourong's safety.

He wanted to meet the Tianhai Divine Empress, to ask her a few things. He wanted to ask her if those things were true, if she really was his mother, and then...and then it would be enough.

He still had Su Li's letter in his bosom, five Heavenly Tome Monoliths as stone pearls on his wrist, and the Garden of Zhou.

But he was not prepared to do anything in the Imperial Palace, it truly was enough. What schemes, what general situation, what righteous cause, what war between the humans and demons? To someone about to die like him, what importance did these hold? And just who would be so heartless to ask him to do anything more at this time?

He just wanted to know a few things, and then he would quietly depart.

No person could decide how they would come to this world, but when leaving, anyone would hope to be clear-minded.

Many people had said these words before, as had he, so he should do it.

But he did not enter the Imperial Palace.

Because deep within the forest of the Hundred Herb Garden, he saw a scene he had once seen before.

There was a stone table in the forest. An iron teapot was placed on the table, with two teacups sitting next to it. Judging by the color of the tea in the cup, the tea brewed today was most likely white tea.

The person drinking the tea was still the middle-aged woman.

Seeing her calm expression, Chen Changsheng was somewhat surprised.

Chapter 628 – Mother And Son (II)

Chen Changsheng had met this middle-aged woman several times, so they were not at all strangers.

He had thought many times about her identity, but he could never find any clues. He found her very enigmatic, but she was certainly some powerful figure of the Imperial Palace.

Tonight, storm clouds were approaching the capital, a drizzle already falling. With the middle-aged woman's status, it made no sense for her to appear here.

Chen Changsheng suddenly thought of a possibility, and his face became somewhat cold in the rain.

Perhaps she had come to kill him?

Fortunately, such an event did not occur, or else he would truly feel rather sad.

The middle-aged woman lightly pointed, just as she usually did, indicating that he should sit and drink tea.

Chen Changsheng exhaled.

This forest in the Hundred Herb Garden had a deep significance to him. This was the place in the capital where he was best able to

calm his heart.

In these two years, those nights where he sat with the middle-aged woman and drank tea were the periods in the capital where he was best able to calm his heart.

If this middle-aged woman chose to kill him in this forest, at this stone table where they drank tea, he would feel very unhappy.

He was fond of this feeling he had when calmly sitting in silence. It was very comfortable, very free, very easily making him recall Xining Village.

His forehead slightly creased as he realized that he did not like recalling Xining Village.

Well, the stream behind the old temple was still clear and limpid.

His brow gradually relaxed.

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Watching his brow crease and then uncrease, seeing the unripe feeling about his face, she realized, oh, in a few days, he'll turn seventeen, but is that fake? But he's truly an extraordinary fellow. He's clearly on the verge of death, but he's still stopping at this

table in the forest and taking up that cup of warm white tea, and he can even wander off and think about other things.

The corner of Tianhai's lip perked upwards incredibly slowly, a smile contained within.

If this youth really is my child, perhaps it's not too bad a thing. At least, he won't bring me too much shame. This way, when I watch you die, perhaps I might feel more of the feelings that I want to feel, thus find a trace of the Heavenly Dao concealed amongst the many stars in the sky, ultimately obtaining true freedom.

The corner of Tianhai's lip gradually turned flat incredibly slowly, and thus that smile vanished to parts unknown.

She quietly watched Chen Changsheng, extending a finger to prick at the space between his eyebrows.

Chen Changsheng awoke from his daze, somewhat startled, but he did not avoid it.

Not because he didn't want to avoid it, but because he couldn't.

No matter if it was him when first entering the capital or the him now, no matter what she wanted to do to him, he was incapable of responding.

At the very beginning, he was somewhat uncomfortable, especially when she held his chin or caressed his cheeks, which

actually made him feel ashamed, but later on...perhaps he got used to it.

With the light touch of the finger, there was an extremely light pop within his sea of consciousness, like a bubble bursting.

The wind blew through the Hundred Herb Garden, carrying with it the fragrance of herbs and spirit fruits, and also some scents that only she could smell.

Because in that instant, her finger had pierced the Sacred Light laid down by Xu Yourong. Her spiritual sense had brought this breeze, and this breeze contained his Qi.

She calmly closed her eyes, carefully experiencing this Qi, her expression gradually softening.

As expected, this Qi was like the spring breeze, causing a person to become intoxicated. It was difficult to imagine what would happen when it was completely released, whether anyone could resist this allure.

She opened her eyes and softly pointed at the table, indicating that Chen Changsheng should drink.

Chen Changsheng had the teacup in his hands this entire time. He took a sip and then put the teacup down.

He gazed at the middle-aged woman, wanting to open his mouth

and say something, but closing it once more. Ultimately, he still could not hold back his words.

"I...in the future, I might not be able to come here again."

He paused, then looked at her and continued, "I am Chen Changsheng."

She quietly gazed at him, no change visible on her face.

Chen Changsheng was at first somewhat surprised, but then he smiled in ridicule at himself. After meeting so many times over these two years, with this middle-aged woman's unfathomable strength, she would naturally have figured out his background.

"Since my lady knows who I am, then you also probably know of my current situation." He lowered his head to gaze at the light tea like clear water within the cup, his voice also growing mild like water. "Even now, I do not know who my lady is, or perhaps precisely because this is so, I've always felt like there are some things that I can't tell other people that I can speak of to my lady."

She quietly watched him, still without any reaction.

In Chen Changsheng's view, or perhaps his wish, this was a sort of encouragement.

He fell into thought, then said, "I'm going to die soon."

He then began to narrate his story, starting from before his birth. Of course, this part was about the results of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets's calculations. After that, he spoke of his life after his birth, the scene described to him by Senior Yu Ren, the clear stream and the great Golden Dragon. Following that was his life in Xining Village's old temple, his coming to the capital to end the engagement, the stories that followed, all the way until the present.

In Xining Village's old temple, no one spoke with him, so he was raised into a taciturn personality. After returning to the capital, he greatly improved, especially after becoming friends with Tang Thirty-Six. He would occasionally display his talkative side, and when with Xu Yourong, he also had many things he wanted to say to her, but he spoke more tonight than on any other occasion.

He had combed over and organized his life, and then poured it out for her to hear.

"When the Demon Lord went to Mount Han, I had my suspicions, but I had no proof. Seeing the current situation...it's very obvious. I know that Master has been using me."

He ended, "But I've always had this illness. In the end, it's still a problem of my fate not being good. Who can I blame for that?"

No matter what he said, she only quietly listened, occasionally taking a sip of tea, her expression very calm.

It was like Xining Village's old temple, the Golden Dragon, the Sacred Light Continent, Chen Xuanba, Zhou Dufu, and these other such names were of no surprise to her.

After he finished his story, Chen Changsheng's mouth felt rather dry. After finishing off the tea in the cup, he realized that she was a bit too calm.

This only increased her mystery in his eyes.

"My lady...just who are you?"

He asked her curiously.

The Hundred Herb Garden was very quiet. There was not even a wisp of a breeze, so there was naturally no sound of wind. The drizzle suddenly stopped, so there was naturally no sound of rain either.

Even the mournful cries of the insects at the base of the wall and in the grass had vanished.

After a very long silence had passed, a voice suddenly rang out.

"Who am I?"

Chen Changsheng was abnormally shocked, because she had spoken these words.

He had heard loud and clear these three words emerge from her mouth.

He had always believed that she could not speak.

In these two years, it had always been him speaking. She had never spoken a single word.

And yet, it turned out that she could always speak, she just did not want to.

Just who was she?

Still overcome with shock, Chen Changsheng suddenly had an extremely intense feeling of wariness and unease.

Because she stood up.

She suddenly became incomparably tall and vast, just like a mountain range suddenly appearing in the world.

She slowly placed her two hands behind her. With the light flick of her sleeves, a gale blew through the forest.

She looked down upon Chen Changsheng, her expression indifferent, the temperature of the forest dropping several degrees.

As the breeze caressed her face, her two eyebrows extended toward her temples, like two swords simultaneously taking flight, or like two wings unfurling.

Her eyes became particularly clear and holy, like stars lay within.

In the space of a few breaths, her mediocre face transformed into the most beautiful face imaginable.

The Qi emitted from her body became incomparably powerful.

Who was she?

Of course, she was the Tianhai Divine Empress who reigned supreme over the heavens above and the earth below.

The forest of the Hundred Herb Garden became even quieter.

Chen Changsheng was holding a teacup and, in his shock, had forgotten to put it down.

After quite some time had passed, he stirred from his daze and placed the teacup down on the table.

He was quiet for another long period of time, then he looked at the teacup and said, "Greetings, my lady."

Very simple words, a proper courtesy, but they should have never appeared between the two of them.

His voice was very calm, but his emotions were unimaginably complex.

Simultaneously, he also understood a few things.

When Xu Yourong had entered the Garden of Zhou, she had once disguised herself. No one had been able to see through it. Later on, she said that it was a secret technique of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green. But though he was well-versed in the Daoist Canon, he had never heard of such a thing.

Now he naturally knew that Xu Yourong's disguise and the technique of the Divine Empress were both the same, or perhaps it was that Phoenixes had the ability to freely change their form?

"Shouldn't you be calling me Mother?" the Tianhai Divine Empress looked at him and asked.

As she spoke, her voice was very apathetic, yet he couldn't tell if it was truly emotionless.

Chen Changsheng raised his head and gazed at this woman so beautiful that it was impossible to look straight at her and thought to himself, is this my mother?

In those years living in Xining Village's old temple after being picked up by his master from the stream, he had naturally considered the question of his mother's identity countless times, but he never had an answer.

Only when that rumor began to spread through the capital last year did he begin to directly confront this question. Then, in Mount Han, he had obtained a sort of confirmation.

Whether before the rumor or after, he would occasionally wonder, if they met...what sort of scene would serve as the backdrop, what he should do. Even when he was jumping out of the window of the house in the Orthodox Academy, resolved to enter the Imperial Palace and directly confront her, he was still considering these questions.

Yet when they truly met, he realized that all his preparations were meaningless.

His mind was somewhat dazzled, his body somewhat cold.

He searched her indifferent and emotionless face of beauty, unable to find a single hint of those feelings he had wanted to have, such as warmth.

The Tianhai Divine Empress sensed the changes in his emotions and arched her brows. "Useless thing, I should have never birthed you in the first place."

As she spoke, her two brows were like swords, seemingly ready to fly into the night sky.

Coupled with the apathy on her face, she gave an even colder aura.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat angry, his nose slightly flaring. "Just a moment ago, I went to kill Zhou Tong."

For these words to appear at this time was rather abrupt, rather inexplicable.

The Tianhai Divine Empress asked, "Do you want to prove that you have a little use? That you have the courage to face this world? To seek a few candies from me to eat?"

Chen Changsheng thought, that's not it, I just wanted to tell you that there are some matters that you don't care about that I can also not care about. I have the courage to kill Zhou Tong, so I also have the courage to confront you.

Even if we are mother and son, even if you are a mother so cruel that you would personally kill your own son.

Chapter 629 – Mother And Son (III)

"Zhou Tong is just a dog, a lackey."

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at Chen Changsheng with an indifferent expression. "While you are my son. Even if you're about to die, even if your death will be by my own hands, even if you can only live for one more day, as long as you are still alive, you will be more important than him by one thousand times, ten thousand times. If you do not even understand this, what right do you have to be my son?"

Chen Changsheng recalled that Prince Chen Liu had said almost identical words in the carriage. He was not deeply moved by these words, only feeling them somewhat strange, out of line with his understanding of the world. Since you plan to heartlessly kill me in cold blood, why do you still care about whether or not I have the right to be your son?

He didn't know what to say, so he once more fell silent.

The Tianhai Divine Empress extended a hand to caress his face.

This sort of scene had often occurred in the last two years, and he had found it very unpleasant and difficult to grow accustomed to. Now, he found it somewhat repulsive. Just who is that gaze of tender affection and pampering for? Just where did this intimate caress come from? Is it all a sham, or are you comforting yourself? Or is it that you want to use this to soothe your Dao heart so that after you kill your own son, your mind will not be affected?

Chen Changsheng felt like a venomous snake was slowly slithering across his face. This extremely loathsome sensation caused his entire body to incessantly tremble.

He found it impossible to continue enduring this and wanted to avoid it, yet he could not move his body. He wanted to take out from his bosom the letter Su Li had left him, yet he couldn't even budge a finger.

"You want to kill me?" the Tianhai Divine Empress looked into his eyes and asked.

For some reason, even though she had perceived Chen Changsheng's intentions, she was not angry. Instead, the hint of a smile seemed to appear in her star-like eyes.

This was a smile of praise. It seemed that she greatly approved of the fact that Chen Changsheng had thought of committing such a monstrous crime against his own mother.

Chen Changsheng only wanted to leave, and thought of nothing else. Looking into her eyes, he knew that she had misunderstood something, but he didn't understand why she would have this sort of reaction after misunderstanding.

"The cycle of the Heavenly Dao, heavenly principles, and proper human relationships—all of it is fake. Mother against son, father against son—these things have taken place in this world countless times. I also want to kill you, so if you want to kill me, I won't feel

there to be anything wrong about that. On the contrary, if you can disregard those false and dull morals and virtues, laws and principles, and produce the desire to kill me, only then can you truly have the right to be my son."

The Tianhai Divine Empress said to him.

Chen Changsheng gazed at her and seriously asked, "My lady... truly plans to kill me?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress replied, "I said before, all of those things are fake. This being the case, why shouldn't I kill you?"

After a pause, Chen Changsheng asked, "Then just what is truly real?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at the Imperial Palace, not speaking for a very long time.

At this time, she was in the Hundred Herb Garden.

She had lived countless years within the Imperial Palace and the Hundred Herb Garden.

Many years ago, she saw in the Imperial Palace an unruly dragonhorse. Emperor Taizong asked everyone, how would they make this dragonhorse obey?

She had voluntarily stepped forward, and then...she was exiled to the Hundred Herb Garden.

For the rest of her life, she would not forget the look of utter contempt and loathing in Emperor Taizong's eyes.

In the Hundred Herb Garden, she suffered through unimaginably difficult times, and the people of her clan suffered even worse. Just when she believed that she would just sink into oblivion, Emperor Xian, who had not forgotten her, secretly came to her. Then, she understood something. Emperor Taizong viewed her with such contempt and loathing...this meant that there was something on her person that assuredly made him feel uneasy. Just what was it? Was it strength, a potential for formidable power, the rarely seen blood of the true Phoenix, or an indistinct omen sent by the Heavenly Dao?

If speaking of understanding of the Heavenly Dao, there was no person in the world with a deeper understanding than her. But even she would sometimes feel tired. Yes, not frustrated, not bewildered, but tired, because reaching the other shore and entering the world of true freedom required far too many long and endless years.

She turned to Chen Changsheng and prepared to say something when she realized that Chen Changsheng's face had grown pale. Simultaneously, an unusual smear of blood-red appeared at the corner of his eyes—at this time, his injuries had finally broken out. His blood containing his soul, or Sacred Light, or the energy of life, burst through his ruptured and shattered meridians, permeating and flowing through his internal organs. The Sacred Light on his

body's surface was already incapable of concealing that smell. The dark forest of early autumn suddenly resounded with the chirps of countless insects.

The Tianhai Divine Empress calmly gazed at him, seeming especially unfeeling.

"Such a rich Qi of life. The smell is truly not bad, I truly was not mistaken."

This was speaking of the conclusion she had made after picking out a strand of Qi from Chen Changsheng's body.

"It seems that those descendants of the deceased truly did go to the Sacred Light Continent. No wonder that even Emperor Taizong, with all his capability, still could not find them after two hundred years."

At this time, Chen Changsheng was in great pain, like tens of thousands of small knives were scraping away at his bones. However, this comment still managed to attract some of his attention.

He knew who the targets of her words were.

The so-called 'descendants of the deceased' referred to the part of the Chen Imperial clan that had escaped the capital after the coup in the Hundred Herb Garden. This part of the Chen Imperial clan might have consisted of the Crown Prince's family, or the members

of the Imperial clan close to the Crown Prince. Naturally, they also included the family of Chen Xuanba. According to the records in the Daoist Canon, this part of the Chen Imperial clan consisted of no less than a thousand people, all extremely competent and talented.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets had said that his body contained an innumerable quantity of Sacred Light, which was assuredly related to the Sacred Light Continent. His senior brother had said that he had been picked out of a stream. That stream flowed from out of the Cloud Grave. Xu Yourong had once said that within the Cloud Grave was a solitary mountain that might be a path to the Sacred Light Continent...

When these pieces of information were combined, the original appearance of this matter gradually took shape.

He truly was the hope of the Chen Imperial clan to regain the imperial throne, or perhaps its method of doing so.

The Tianhai Divine Empress took in the thickening scent pervading the autumn forest, her forehead creasing deeper and deeper, the bright stars in the depths of her eyes seeming to slightly waver, their light also seeming to dim. At the same time, her face revealed a callousness and loathing, two feelings that were not complete opposites but also ones that should not have appeared at the same time.

Then, she closed her eyes.

When she opened her eyes again, those emotions had all utterly vanished, leaving only calmness and indifference.

She lightly flicked her sleeve, and an indescribable pressure instantly enveloped the forest. Several strands of clear light spilled out of her sleeve and fell on Chen Changsheng's body.

This Qi which was sufficient to cause all the world's living beings to grow obsessed, even crazy, with desire was temporarily cut off by these lights.

Those insects loudly chirping in the Hundred Herb Garden, at a loss, gradually ceased their cries. The autumn forest returned to tranquility.

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at Chen Changsheng, mocking, "Now you know that you've been used by someone, no?"

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a very long time. With great difficulty, he raised up his right hand that was shuddering from pain and gripped the already empty teacup, replying, "I've never met those people."

The people he spoke of were naturally those descendants of the deceased hidden in the darkness, those descendants of the Chen Imperial clan that had already left this continent for many years.

"There are some people that you don't need to see to know how despicable, dirty and shameless they are, because their blood itself

stinks."

The Tianhai Divine Empress held her hands behind her and gazed to the night sky towards the distant east, emotionlessly saying, "A father killing his own son, a younger brother killing his older brother—these sorts of things have occurred in this clan far too many times. I still remember when Taizong still reigned, when Crown Prince Chengqian was put to death, the Prince of Wei, Tai, entered the palace to see Emperor Taizong. The moment he saw him, he threw himself into Emperor Taizong's bosom, wailing as he spoke, 'Only from today can I be counted as Your Majesty's true son. I have a son. When I'm about to die, I will absolutely kill him for Your Majesty's sake, then pass it on to Your Majesty's beloved [Prince of Jin](#).'"

(TN: This incident refers to an actual historical incident involving the sons of Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty. At the time, Taizong's crown prince was Li Chengqian, who was often in dispute with his brother, Li Tai, the Prince of Wei. Li Chengqian eventually began to lose favor with Taizong and began plotting a rebellion to overthrow him. This plot was revealed, resulting in Li Chengqian being deposed to the rank of commoner. Taizong was split between the choice to make either Li Tai or Li Zhi, the Prince of Jin, crown prince. In order to ingratiate himself to Taizong, Li Tai promised that if he were made crown prince, then when he was about to die, he would kill his own son and pass the throne to Li Zhi. This statement backfired and Li Zhi was eventually chosen to become crown prince, and ultimately, Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty.)

Speaking up to here, she stopped and turned to Chen Changsheng, asking, "Hearing this, what do you feel?"

Chen Changsheng's body was still trembling out of pain, but also

out of emotion. "I feel...it's very disgusting, very cold."

The Tianhai Divine Empress smirked. "At the time, everyone who heard this felt the same as you, yet...our Emperor Taizong didn't seem to think this way at all. He was very pleased, even saying, 'Who does not love their son? When We see the Prince of Wei in this state, We deeply pity him.'"

Chen Changsheng thought, Emperor Taizong is regarded as the wisest sovereign throughout the ages. How could he be deceived by such childish and absurd words?

"Emperor Taizong was naturally not deceived, but he really did admire the Prince of Wei's shamelessness—he had just killed his elder brother, yet he wanted nothing more than to squeeze into his father's bosom and suck on his breast milk. Not everyone could do something like this... It's said that the son resembles the father. Emperor Taizong did the same to his own father, so could he still have the face to criticize the Prince of Wei over anything?"

When the Tianhai Divine Empress mentioned Emperor Taizong, her tone became somewhat harsh, even vulgar.

Chen Changsheng raised his head to her and asked, "Why is my lady telling me these things? Previously when my lady thought that I wanted to kill you and found it very admirable, was it for the same reason?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress replied, "I just wanted to tell you that the Chen Imperial clan, whether it's Emperor Taizong's line or

those descendants of the deceased imperials, are all hypocritical and disgusting things."

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng said, "The blood of the Chen clan also flows within my body, so I must also be hypocritical and disgusting?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress answered, "You can interpret my meaning in this way."

Chen Changsheng looked into her eyes and said, "In the end, my lady just wants to kill me, so is finding some reasons or excuses."

The Tianhai Divine Empress lightly mocked, "If I want to kill someone, when did I ever need a reason or excuse?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "But in the end, I'm different."

The Tianhai Divine Empress arched her brows. "Where is your difference?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "After all, I am your son. If you are like Emperor Taizong, then the history books of the future will write about it, so you must give an explanation."

The Tianhai Divine Empress replied, "I, a woman sitting on the imperial throne, have never harbored any extravagant delusions about receiving any good evaluations from later generations. Do I look like someone that cares about commentary to you?"

Chen Changsheng thought of the cruel methods she had used to control the government after ascending to the throne and concluded that this was the case. However, there were still some other questions that needed resolving.

He replied, "Every person has to give an explanation for their own choices. Even if they don't care what anyone else in the world thinks, one still has to convince themselves."

The Tianhai Divine Empress calmly gazed at him, noting, "Maybe so."

Chen Changsheng continued, "Since we've finished talking, what is my lady waiting for? Kill me or eat me, complete your changing of fate, complete all causes and effects, to assist my lady in living for all ages."

The Tianhai Divine Empress replied, "That's reasonable, you were originally a piece of flesh that fell from my stomach. For me to eat you again into my stomach is truly a matter in accord with the laws of the heavens and earth."

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Chapter 630 – The Second Squirrel

The dark forest was eerily quiet. The winter cicadas were unable to chirp, and the autumn insects did not cry out.

The tea on the stone table was already cold, the lights extinguished.

Suddenly, a rustling could be heard from the forest.

The two people looked and saw a squirrel quickly running across a tree.

This squirrel was very fat, its shaggy tail a gray shadow. It looked very cute.

Seeing this, for some reason, Chen Changsheng forgot about his coming death or what might be a conclusion even more miserable than death. His face revealed an innocent smile.

The Tianhai Divine Empress did not smile. She only quietly gazed at the squirrel, thinking of something.

She waved her sleeve as if brushing away some emotions that she found unpleasant.

The cute squirrel was currently jumping towards another tree when it transformed midair into a flower of blood.

Chen Changsheng froze. Rather sad, he asked, "Why?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress did not answer his question. What answered his question was a series of sounds from the dark forest.

These sounds were very dull puffing sounds like a leather bag filled with wine that could no longer take the internal pressure and thus burst.

A middle-aged man tottered out from behind a tree, his stomach already deflated like it had been directly crushed by some terrifying pressure. Blood was constantly spurting from his eyes, ears, and nose. Before he had time to say anything, he collapsed to the ground.

Chen Changsheng recognized him as one of the three cardinals of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education.

He had come to find Chen Changsheng, or perhaps follow the Li Palace's order and protect him.

He had just died in front of Chen Changsheng's eyes.

Those dull sounds continued. In the early autumn forest, in the trees or in the fallen leaves, ten-odd flowers of blood exploded out.

Every flower of blood represented the explosion and death of an

expert of the Orthodoxy.

Further off in the darkness, some Orthodoxy experts who had not been affected were forced out and ran off in all directions to escape, but how could they run faster than the wind that ran through the forest?

As he viewed this scene so terrifying that it bordered on bizarre, Chen Changsheng's body turned cold.

The people dying in front of him were all extraordinary experts of rare talent, but before the Tianhai Divine Empress, they were all powerless.

The Tianhai Divine Empress had already placed her hands behind her back, but the wind stirred up by her sleeves was still coursing through the forest.

The merciless slaughter continued. Occasionally, someone would die, their death too miserable to describe.

Chen Changsheng cried that it was enough.

He thought that his voice was loud enough, yet she seemed not to hear.

He felt like his voice was stained in blood, yet she seemed to have no reaction.

Several dozen no longer intact corpses quietly lay within the dark forest.

The Tianhai Divine Empress expressionlessly gazed into the darkness and raised her right hand once more.

A muffled cry of pain suddenly came from the darkness, and then a person was forced into the light.

The person coming out of the darkness was Liu Qing, the sword in his hands already bent, his clothes covered in wounds, blood constantly flowing out of them.

He kneeled in the leaves, gazing behind Chen Changsheng at the Tianhai Divine Empress, his eyes filled with shock and reverence, but no fear.

Su Li and the enigmatic assassin had left this continent. He, who was already at peak Star Condensation in Mount Han, was without question the world's most powerful assassin, but it was simply impossible for him to get close to the Tianhai Divine Empress. Even his secret art to conceal himself in the darkness had been seen through at a glance. He was just a joke before her.

After confronting the Demon Lord in Mount Han, he was already well aware of the gap between him and the true experts of the Divine Domain, understood how ridiculous his insisting Su Li lead them to the capital and kill the Divine Empress was, but he had still come to the capital.

Because he was an assassin and this was what he should do.

Assassins eventually had to die, and for him to die at the hands of one of the continent's supreme experts was completely satisfactory. He even felt excited. Neither Su Li nor his big sister had ever had a true exchange with Tianhai, and even though he had undoubtedly lost, he had still tried. Moreover...Tianhai was truly very strong!

Seeing the Tianhai Divine Empress standing by the stone table, Liu Qing began to breathe rather quickly, his eyes turning bright as if he was rather excited.

The Tianhai Divine Empress slightly arched her brows.

She knew that Liu Qing was a person of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets. She had originally planned to spare him out of respect for the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, but now she was prepared to kill him, because she did not like being looked at by people in this way.

He didn't know whether it was because he was watching her every moment or because their hearts were connected through some mysterious and inexorable method, but when Chen Changsheng heard the crunching of leaves being stepped on by shoes and saw her arch her brows, he knew that she was prepared to kill Liu Qing, just like how she had ruthlessly killed those priests of the Li Palace.

In Xunyang City, Liu Qing had saved Su Li, and in Mount Han, he

had assisted Chen Changsheng, so Chen Changsheng certainly could not allow him to die. Thus, Chen Changsheng grew very anxious, especially when he heard the faint galloping of hooves from beyond the walls and guessed that the Orthodox cavalry were beginning to move towards this location. If he could not prevent her from killing more people, then there was a high chance that the Orthodox Academy and the Hundred Herb Garden would become a horrifying graveyard.

However, he currently couldn't move, only slightly move his neck around, so he could again try to use words to convince her. He gazed at the Tianhai Divine Empress and begged, "Please let them go. They're all low-ranked cavalry and have nothing to do with major events like this. As for him...he's always been crazy, there's no need to kill him."

The Tianhai Divine Empress lowered her head to glance at him, asking, "Why should I consent to this?"

Chen Changsheng fell silent, then replied, "Since you gave birth to me but didn't raise me, I won't ask for anything more, only for this."

The Tianhai Divine Empress's brows leapt up once more, seeming to be mocking him.

Chen Changsheng just pretended he did not see the change in her expression, continuing, "What need is there to kill so many people? Isn't killing me enough?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress drew back her gaze to a splatter of blood on the leaves. This blood splatter was not left by a priest of the Li Palace, but by that squirrel of which only the tail remained.

For some reason, she seemed to silently contemplate that blood splatter for a very long time.

The hooves of the cavalry drew closer and closer to the walls, and the Orthodox Academy also seemed to be thrown into chaos. Chen Changsheng could even hear the cries of Tang Thirty-Six.

Time was still passing, and he continued to grow nervous.

Suddenly, the Tianhai Divine Empress grabbed his collar. The wind swept through the autumn forest, and they were gone.

With great difficulty, Liu Qing dragged himself up from the fallen leaves. He spit out some more blood and gazed at the now vacant stone table with a confused expression.

With several bangs and the opening of a door, several apertures were opened in the academy wall, the Orthodoxy cavalry and the people within the Orthodox Academy charging through them into the forest.

Liu Qing turned and vanished into the darkness.

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Chen Changsheng only felt his body grow light, and then he realized that he was in the air, the autumn forest of the Hundred Herb Garden now a faraway blanket at his feet. The lights of the Imperial Palace were now the reflections of stars in the river, and the blazing torches of the Orthodox Academy were also fading into the distance. Soon after, he saw the distant Qu River and the Dallying Forest, then they plunged into the clouds.

They broke through the clouds amidst the howling of chilly winds, then the ground and those clear and shallow canals upon it came up to meet him. When his two feet finally rested on the ground and he looked around, he realized that he was in the Mausoleum of Books.

Right afterwards, his two feet once more left the ground. It wasn't because he was flying, but because he was being carried.

The Tianhai Divine Empress carried him like he was a small bird waiting to be slaughtered. Crossing the clear canals on the stone plain, they came to the lower end of the Mausoleum of Books's Divine Path.

There was a pavilion here, and under this pavilion sat a man covered all over in armor, looking just like a bronze statue.

Tonight, there were many clouds over the capital and not many stars could be seen.

When the Tianhai Divine Empress carried Chen Changsheng to this pavilion, a tiny crack opened up in the clouds, the starlight spilling down through this crack onto the armor.

The person in the armor thus awakened, a distant and ancient gaze appearing in the gloomy depths of the helmet.

The Tianhai Divine Empress ordered, "Kill all who step upon the Divine Path."

The person in the armor did not speak, only slowly raised his right hand and gripped the sword at his waist.

With his movement, several plumes of dust spurted from his armor, six centuries of time seemingly contained within.

Chapter 631 – Tonight

The Tianhai Divine Empress ascended the Divine Path paved with white jade.

The Mausoleum of Books was the continent's most unique location. In this place, the laws and principles of the world all had an enormous effect. Even supreme experts who had transcended the Divine Domain could not fly. They could only rely on their two feet to ascend. Of course, besides an unparalleled expert like her, other people simply didn't even have a hope of taking one step onto the Divine Path.

This was the first time Chen Changsheng had stepped upon the Mausoleum of Books' Divine Path, although his feet didn't even touch its surface.

This was a place that countless cultivators only dreamed of setting foot on, and he had once seen with his own eyes as Xun Mei attempted to charge into the Divine Path and died, leaving an even deeper impression upon him.

At this moment, seeing the Divine Path under the starlight, so sacred and pure that it did not seem to belong to this world, he had no time to feel emotional. What he first thought of was many questions.

Why had the Divine Empress brought him to this place? Why had she left Divine General Han Qing with those words at the bottom of the path? The entire world knew that the army of the Great

Zhou Dynasty was under the command of the thirty-eight Divine Generals, and the vast majority of these thirty-eight were loyal to the Divine Empress, except...the one at the very top, Divine General Han Qing.

Divine General Han Qing was the sole remaining member of the Divine Generals from Taizong's era, even older than Divine General Fei Dian. When he was scourging the snowy plains, the Divine Empress was still deep within the palace, so there should have been no old friendship between the two. It was said that he had pledged his life to Emperor Taizong, and the reason he had guarded the mausoleum for six centuries without leaving was that Emperor Taizong had left behind a final order that he should do so. But previously, the attitude the Divine Empress assumed when speaking to him seemed to indicate that she was very sure he would obey her decree, so why was this?

The Divine General had probably gotten infinitely close to the Divine Domain many years ago and was widely acknowledged as the strongest if one excluded the Five Saints and Eight Storms. There was even a theory that if he had not been standing guard over the Mausoleum of Books for six centuries, perhaps he would have long since broken through that threshold and entered the Divine Domain! If he was actually an expert that the Divine Empress had arranged to be in the Mausoleum of Books, the Divine Empress's opponents would undoubtedly be extremely shocked.

The dark clouds formed again and the starlight vanished once more. The pure and sacred Divine Path also grew gloomy under the darkness, now somewhat chilling to behold.

Just as Chen Changsheng was thinking about these things, the Divine Path under the Tianhai Divine Empress's feet became a stream of clear water flowing west, flowing into the distance, and she had already come to its source.

The source of this river was the highest point of the Mausoleum of Books, as well as the highest point of the capital.

The Tianhai Divine Empress loosened her grip and threw him to the ground. Clasp ing her hands behind her, she walked to the edge of the Divine Path and gazed at the world below the Mausoleum of Books.

The altitude of this place was even higher than the Dew Platform. When she looked over this world, she naturally looked down upon it, naturally viewed it from high above, because this had always been her world.

Very few people were able to stand on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books. After Emperor Xian returned to the sea of stars, only the Divine Empress and the Pope had come.

Chen Changsheng was the third person to reach this place, but he felt no honor in it, because he had been carried up, and he was also in incredible pain, about to die at any moment.

On his first time in the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng had personally witnessed that Xun Mei had been willing to pay his life to ascend to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books. Seeing now that he had managed to reach the peak without effort, Chen

Changsheng felt rather downcast, rather sorrowful.

Although he was downcast and sad, he still looked all around him, wanting to clearly see this place's scenery and remember it. It wasn't out of any desire for the Great Dao nor was it out of curiosity. He only wanted to see it in place of Senior Xun Mei, and if he truly could meet with those people who had passed away in the Divine Kingdom above the stars, he could tell Xun Mei just what this place looked like.

The summit of the Mausoleum of Books was very ordinary and unremarkable, just like the summit of any other mountain. The only difference was a stone plain.

But this was still the place that all cultivators dreamed of reaching, so it was impossible for it to be as ordinary as it seemed.

Chen Changsheng's meridians were currently all shattered and no waves could form in his sea of consciousness, so he could not send out his spiritual sense. Even so, he could sense that on this stone plain and the surrounding forest and rocks, profound and incomprehensible laws and principles existed. Moreover, these laws that should have been invisible and ethereal seemed to be nigh corporeal, but in his current state, it was impossible for him to see them.

This mountain was the Mausoleum of Books because of the many Heavenly Tome Monoliths upon it, so would the peak of the Mausoleum of Books also have a Heavenly Tome Monolith?

His gaze moved about the summit, finally resting upon a black object in the depths of the stone plain.

Tonight was cloudy and starless, and the lights of the capital could not shine upon the lofty peak of the Mausoleum of Books. Everything up here was dim and difficult to clearly see, so he could only judge by shape that this was a monolith. Was this Heavenly Tome Monolith just like the last section of the Essay on the Origin of the Dao, its surface recording the most abstruse and incomprehensible, yet most sublime Great Dao?

Chen Changsheng thought this way, yet he could not make out clearly what was written, or drawn, on this stone monolith.

"In the past one thousand years, the number of people who have truly been able to understand this monolith does not surpass five."

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood at the edge of the Divine Path, not turning around.

Chen Changsheng shifted his gaze to her back.

At the moment, he was sitting on the ground, raising his head towards her. From this angle, she seemed to be standing in the clouds, in the night sky, incomparably lofty and grand.

"What is my lady waiting for? Just kill me and bring everything to an end," Chen Changsheng said to her.

"The problem is that I don't want to bring everything to an end so quickly." The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at the world below the Mausoleum of Books, from the extremely distant coast to the night food stall across the river outside the Mausoleum of Books. She continued, "How many people want you to die, how many people want you to live—tonight is the best time to see all of them, and I would like to take a look."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Why do you want to see this?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress replied, "Tonight, everyone that wants to save you is my enemy, but the people that want you dead aren't necessarily my people. If they appear tonight, even if they're several thousand li away, furtively peeking like mice, then it means that their hearts contain a hint of rebellion, so then they are also my enemies."

"Why do you want to know who your enemies are?"

"Normally, those people hide themselves very well. Seizing this opportunity, I'll seek them all out, and then kill them all."

"And if the entire world is your enemy?"

"Then I'll kill off half the world, and then the other half naturally won't dare to be my enemies anymore."

Chen Changsheng fell silent, finally understanding what she wished to do.

Truly a terrifying woman that inspired fear in others.

He sat on the ice-cold ground, leaning against the steps, gazing at the seemingly quiet and beautiful world below the Mausoleum of Books, shrouded in darkness. He thought to himself, just how many people will die tonight? This depends on how many people appear today in the capital, or perhaps she said, it depends on how many people appear someplace in the darkness to stealthily watch the capital.

The Tianhai Divine Empress waved her sleeve and a clear stream of light flashed out. A surface of light several feet in radius appeared in the night sky in front of him.

This surface of light was not near or far. It was placed at the perfect distance so that the two of them could see it clearly.

The scenes in the night sky incessantly fluctuated: at times the Imperial Palace, at times the Orthodox Academy, at times the official road outside the capital, at times, a black silhouette barely visible against the darkness.

The scenes changed too quickly for Chen Changsheng to see them clearly. He only knew that, in a little while, all the people that appeared in these scenes would be killed by her.

Tonight was an ordinary evening in early autumn.

But after tonight, this night would inevitably become the most important evening of the Great Zhou Dynasty's Zhengtong era.

Tonight, the people who had the qualifications, or the daring, to come to the capital and save Chen Changsheng were undoubtedly not ordinary people. Those people concealed in the darkness, watching the situation in the capital, were also not ordinary people.

The dark clouds in the night sky grew thicker and thicker, the lights in the streets of the capital growing dimmer and dimmer. The world grew gloomier and gloomier, the atmosphere more and more tense.

Certain places in the capital seemed to grow somewhat turbulent and then quickly calmed back down, ultimately returning to a deathly stillness.

Suddenly, in the night sky to the northwest of the capital, a light appeared. This light was not very dazzling, seeming like someone had torn out a chunk of the clouds in that place, revealing the many stars behind it. Behind these numerous stars was sparkling and translucent splendor, perhaps the moonlight rumored to only be visible to demons?

In the official road at that location, the willows on both sides rustled despite the lack of wind, as if bowing towards the center of the road.

There was no army in the center of the road, no convoy of

carriages, only two people.

A man in a bamboo hat was pushing a wheelchair, seeming to slowly proceed along the official road towards the distant capital.

Traveling from the shambles of the Myriad Willows Garden in Tianliang County to this place required a very long time. To the man in the wheelchair, he had been already been walking for two-hundred-some years.

Two hundred years ago, Emperor Xian could not appear in court due to his illness, and so Tianhai began to formally manage the government. From that moment, the man in the wheelchair came to the capital no more, because he feared her.

Tonight, he had finally come, probably because he realized that he did not have much time left on this world. Before death, all other fears dulled.

Two of the Storms of the Eight Directions, Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke, had come to the capital.

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Seeing the scene in the night sky in front of him, seeing Zhu Luo in his wheelchair, seeing the famous sword at his waist, Chen Changsheng very naturally recalled that battle in the rain at

Xunyang City.

He remembered very clearly how Su Li had once jeered at Zhu Luo, saying that because he was afraid of Tianhai, he didn't dare take one step into the capital.

For Zhu Luo to come to the capital tonight, perhaps he had already resolved himself to die. Together with his fellow Storm Guan Xingke, although they were only two, the momentum they traveled with surpassed an army of a thousand soldiers and ten thousand cavalry.

"Guan Xingke's personality is too calm and tranquil, bearing no love or hate for anything in this world. His heart rests amongst the stars, so lonely as to make others feel sorrow. He can advance no further in this life and is not worth any anxiety."

The Tianhai Divine Empress held her hands behind her back as she examined the two people on the official road, saying, "Zhu Luo has had his courage frightened out of him by Su Li, yet he still dares to come to the capital. Perhaps this might change a few variables, but in the end, he has already been crippled. His coming is just sending himself to death and nothing more."

Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke were two supreme experts of the Divine Domain, ranking within the Storms of the Eight Directions, yet in her evaluation, they were completely useless people.

The scene in the night sky changed once more, the light falling upon the Divine Path following suit. Chen Changsheng's

complexion flickered between bright and gloomy, his mood the same, because now, the scene had turned to a waterway to the southeast of the capital.

This was a canal between Luoyang and the capital, using for transporting grain. The canal was extremely wide, but according to the laws of the Imperial Court, boats were forbidden from traversing it at night. Now, however, an extravagantly large ship was traveling through this canal. As this great ship broke through the water, it raised wave after wave. The originally clear canal became a rather dark blue in the darkness, yet it could not obscure that dark red in the water.

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Chapter 632 – Seventeen Rebellious Princes

[The red of the river flowers at dawn surpass fire.](#)

(TN: A line from 'Remembering Jiangnan' by Bai Juyi. The following line is "The river waters in spring are as green as bluegrass.")

It was currently still late at night, yet a gaily-colored red flower was quietly blooming amongst the numerous blue-green waves.

Two people were standing at the bow of the ship. One was a man dressed in the attire of a scribe, with a red flower, real or made of silk, tied to his pinkie finger. The other person was a Daoist nun, her age difficult to tell. Her appearance could be considered delicate and pretty, yet there was a vicious aura about her that engendered disgust in others. The horsetail whisk she held in her arms gave off a terrifying Qi of extinction, somewhat contradictory with her appearance.

Chen Changsheng recognized the Daoist nun, knew that she was Wuqiong Bi of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

On the ten thousand li journey from Mount Han to the capital, he had also seen that little red flower. Since that scribe was standing by Wuqiong Bi, he was naturally another member of the Eight Storms: Bie Yanghong.

Wuqiong Bi had once infiltrated the capital and had prepared to kill Xuanyuan Po in the Orthodox Academy, but was forced into startled retreat by Su Li's letter. Tonight, however, she came with her husband to the capital. From a certain perspective, they were coming to save him. The complex feelings Chen Changsheng was

feeling were because of this.

"This dunce actually dares to come to the capital."

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at the large ship on the screen of light and expressionlessly said, "A single finger is enough to pinch her to death, but her man isn't bad, worth at least three of her."

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say. Whether it was the two men on the official road to the northwest or this couple on the canal to the southwest, they were all regarded as gods in the hearts of the world's cultivators, but in the Tianhai Divine Empress's words, besides Bie Yanghong, none of them could make her the least bit wary.

But after all, she was the Tianhai Divine Empress.

What Chen Changsheng felt was naturally different from what she felt.

Of the Eight Storms, four had come.

Tonight, storms would certainly sweep over the gloomy skies of the capital, the heavens would sway and the earth would shake.

This was only the grand lifting of the curtain. Soon after, countless people took the stage, one after the other.

In the official roads that spread out like a spider web from the capital, many armies appeared. These people seemed to have always been concealed in the darkness, just waiting for these four supreme experts to appear. Then, they could suddenly tear through the darkness and appear before the entire world, just as they had done for the past two hundred years.

The official roads were the roads leading from the various counties and provinces to the capital.

Those people had always been living in those counties and provinces far away from the capital. They all shared an identical characteristic: they were all surnamed Chen, all descendants of Emperor Taizong.

Chen Changsheng stared at the constantly changing scenes, silently counting. He confirmed that in the darkness, fifteen armies were heading towards the capital.

Those people coming from the various princes' estates of the counties and provinces were not numerous, but they were all experts. Those experts traveling around the imperial carriages were at least at the upper level of Star Condensation. Over these past two-hundred-some years, especially in the most recent twenty, the Chen Imperial clan had seemed to almost silently go into hiding, but tonight, they finally revealed their incomparably deep and hidden strength!

Fifteen counties or provinces, fifteen princes, fifteen imperial

carriages.

In the darkness, dust rose up from the official roads and collided with the wind and clouds, swept up until it arrived in the outskirts of the capital.

The capital of the Great Zhou had no city walls, but it did have a city gate, as well as a City Gate Department, under the command of the Divine General of the East Xu Shiji. Yet...how could the City Gate Department possibly obstruct these imperial carriages from the provinces and counties? Who knew which general of the City Gate Department was the disciple of some prince, whose military officer's father was still working as the chief bodyguard of the Prince of Luling?

Several of the city gates exploded with ripples of Qi and indistinct sword glows, then they quickly faded away.

The princes of the Chen clan finally returned to the capital that they had long been parted from.

Those experts by the imperial carriages of the princes watched the darkness with determined expressions, prepared at any time to confront the suppression of the Great Zhou Army. If these experts required description, they could be described with a single phrase: heroes of the world. They had sufficient confidence in their own strength and cultivation, and they believed that what they were doing was right.

"Outstanding heroes gathered in the capital, attempting to

behead the Demon Empress in the autumn night and cast it away, spilling hot blood and using their bodies to die for the country?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress viewed these scenes in the darkness, not concealing her scorn in the slightest. "Tens of thousands of years later, perhaps this is what will be written in the history books—truly an absurd matter."

Chen Changsheng looked at those experts who carried fervent expressions in silence for a few moments before asking, "Then how should it be written?"

"On the twenty-first year of the Great Zhou Dynasty's Zhengtong era, seventeen rebellious princes entered the capital. All were exterminated."

The Tianhai Divine Empress indifferently stated, lightly flicking her sleeve, as if brushing away all this into smoke and ashes.

Chen Changsheng thought, where are the other two rebellious princes?

Several hundred li away from the capital, in Luoyang, there were not many clouds tonight, the innumerable stars in the sky shining over the world as they usually did, whether it was the stench-ridden alleys where the poor resided or the red-lacquered doors in the northern part of the city.

The great gate of the prince's estate was slowly pushed open and

the Prince of Xiang walked out. With great difficulty, he moved his obese body down the stone steps. With the assistance of his subordinates, after a long while, he was finally able to clamber into the not-at-all-high imperial carriage. Even a simple action such as this left him gasping for breath.

Upon sitting down, his belly fat drooped down over his bright yellow belt, looking rather uncomfortable.

The Prince of Xiang untied the yellow belt and massaged the fat, and his heart was suddenly filled with a feeling of deep sorrow.

He had lived in Luoyang for so many years, and for the sake of avoiding the attention of his imperial mother, he had eaten and drunk to the utmost. He had grown so fat that in the future, if he was able to ascend to the imperial throne, how could he accept the obeisance of the numerous officials with such an appearance? But it was still fine; at least he wasn't like the seventh brother, actually throwing donkey dung into his mouth in order to feign madness. Feh, that was a true madman!

Everyone in the prince's estate, whether it was his concubines or his subordinates, kneeled down in a dense mass on the long street and said as one, "Congratulations to Your Highness on returning to the capital."

The Prince of Xiang sighed at the crowd, saying, "What's there to congratulate me over? Only ghosts know if I'll be able to come back alive."

The street outside the prince's estate became extremely quiet, those favored concubines of his looking at each other in dismay. Someone began to mournfully cry, yet it was impossible to know if it was sincere.

The Prince of Xiang, rather annoyed, waved his hand. "You're crying over this? Fine, fine, if I can't come back, all of you commit suicide and accompany this prince."

Hearing this, the street once more grew quiet, and then broke out into mass weeping. This time, it was very obvious that the concubines and subordinates were weeping with sincerity, overcome with grief.

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In the street outside the provincial mansion of Jiangnan province, a similar scene occurred, but not completely the same.

The Prince of Zhongshan walked out of the kneeling crowd with no emotions on his pale face. Only in the very depths of his slightly bloodshot eyes could some madness be made out.

As he walked, a trail of clear footprints were left outside the prince's estate, footprints of blood.

Like he had walked out of a sea of blood.

In truth, at this moment, the estate of the Prince of Zhongshan had already become a sea of blood. Those subordinates dispatched by the Imperial Court were collapsed in pools of blood, their heads separated from their bodies.

All of them had been personally killed by the Prince of Zhongshan.

Only one person had not been killed, a chief eunuch. He was currently being forced to kneel behind the gate of the prince's estate.

This chief eunuch was very old, his face covered in wrinkles. He clearly knew that he was about to die, yet his expression was calm. He gazed at the Prince of Zhongshan who was about to board the carriage and said, "Your Highness, since you did not kill me, presumably Your Highness does not wish to completely fall out with the Empress. The journey to the capital is long. There is no harm in Your Highness taking your time, to look at the situation and then consider what to do."

This was exceptionally exquisite advice. First he offered an explanation for the Prince of Zhongshan, then he proposed a plan, a truly wise and prudent plan.

The Prince of Zhongshan ignored the old eunuch. Leaping onto the imperial carriage, he said, "I didn't kill you because I wanted to leave myself some retreat, I just want you to try out what I've been feeling all these years."

The old eunuch's complexion changed at these words, no longer able to keep his composure.

Under the escort of several dozen elites of the prince's estate, the Prince of Zhongshan's imperial carriage entered the darkness, heading towards the capital.

Only the prince's bone-piercingly cold voice still resonated in the street.

"Don't let this old dog die, but don't give him food to eat. Only give him donkey dung. Remember, it has to be fresh, the freshest."

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Storms swept over the gloomy sky and met.

Seventeen rebellious princes entered the capital.

Seeing these scenes in the darkness, Chen Changsheng knew that he was witnessing the most important event on the continent since the tragic incident of the Orthodox Academy.

He was the cause of this event, or the introduction. When he thought of the many people that would die tonight, the many

commoners that would be left wandering and homeless in the aftermath, or killed in the chaos of war, his emotions grew somewhat agitated and uneasy. He only felt a ball of disgust in his stomach and couldn't help but cough. Every cough only deepened his pain, his face growing paler and paler.

"This preposterous show is very interesting. Watch a bit more and then die. Don't die too early."

The Tianhai Divine Empress had heard his coughs and, without turning around, impassively advised.

With these words, Chen Changsheng suddenly sensed that he could move.

He knew that this was her intention. He was pondering if he could do anything else.

He had Su Li's letter in his bosom, he still had many swords in his sheath. He had the Heavenly Tome Monoliths and much more.

Yet her figure was so lofty and grand. She was under the night sky, yet she seemed above it.

He put his hand in his bosom. He didn't take out the letter, but a small porcelain bottle.

This bottle contained medicine.

He poured out several dozen pills from the bottle. Without differentiating them, he threw them into his mouth and began chewing on them like candies, the pills crunching as he ate.

Upon coming to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, the Divine Empress had not once turned to look at him, but upon hearing this sound, she glanced at him.

Chen Changsheng paid no attention to her gaze. Soon after, he unwrapped the metal needles from his finger and stabbed them into several critical Qi openings on his neck.

His face paled even more and his body began to tremble as if he could not stand the autumn wind.

With the passing of time, the trembling gradually ceased and on his face appeared two rather abnormal patches of blood.

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The Divine Empress's enemies, one by one, appeared in the darkness, not because this was their best opportunity, but because it was their last.

If they allowed her to kill Chen Changsheng and complete the

third changing of fate in the past one thousand years, then perhaps no one would ever be able to invite her off the Great Zhou imperial throne.

The supreme experts who lived secluded from the world, the princes of the Imperial clan who had patiently waited, the heroes of the world who had silently suffered, all converged upon the capital. But this was not all, because the world was vast and the Divine Empress's enemies numerous. On the official road to the south, figures gradually appeared. The Mount Li Sword Sect sent no one, Holy Maiden Peak sent no one, Scholartree Manor sent no one, the Longevity Sect sent no one, but the Qiushan clan head and that old Guardian came, the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan came, and the wily head of the Wu clan came. Of the Four Great Clans, three had come, but what of the Tang clan?

Chapter 633 – The Tang Second Master

Tonight, the Orthodox Academy was buzzing with activity. First, Chen Changsheng vanished and the army of the Imperial Court and the cavalry of the Orthodoxy came into conflict with each other. Then, Chen Changsheng returned, but not much later, he disappeared again. In the autumn forest beyond the academy walls came countless miserable screams and terrifying ripples of Qi, yet when the Orthodoxy cavalry, Tang Thirty-Six, and the others hurried over, they saw nothing else other than corpses and blood.

The army of the Imperial court still surrounded the Orthodox Academy. From Hundred Flowers Lane, to the main street, all the way to the walls of the Imperial Palace, people were everywhere, the signs of conflict occasionally visible on the surface of the streets and walls. Tang Thirty-Six stood at the gate of the Orthodox Academy, gazing into the darkness. His handsome face no longer carried any of its usual careless disregard, but was now extremely solemn.

Su Moyu was pacifying the teachers and students while Zhexiu was patrolling with the disciples of South Stream Temple. The gate of the Orthodox Academy was heavily guarded by the Orthodoxy cavalry, and so logically speaking, no person would dare launch an attack here. However, Tang Thirty-Six understood very clearly that the Orthodox Academy could not simply obtain peace—something was certain to occur.

In front of the Orthodox Academy's gate, on the side of an alley, was a tea house. Last autumn, during the All-School Martial Exhibition, Mao Qiuyu and Daoist Siyuan, these two Prefects of the Orthodoxy, would often come here to drink tea in order to ensure

that the situation did not get out of control. Tonight, however, it was very obvious that the Li Palace was shrouded in storms, so it was impossible for those two Prefects to be present in the tea house.

But a sound suddenly came from the tea house, the sound of someone coming downstairs.

A person was coming downstairs.

Tang Thirty-Six slightly narrowed his eyes, growing more and more uneasy, feeling that he had heard those footsteps before.

The wooden door of the tea house was pushed open from the inside, the owner of the tea house respectfully sending off a person.

It was a very handsome man, his face somewhat similar to Tang Thirty-Six's, but clearly much older. He could already be considered middle-aged, yet it was still enough for him to charm countless girls.

The Orthodoxy cavalry in front of the gate instantly tensed up. Tonight, with the armies of the Imperial Court guarding the perimeter and the Orthodoxy cavalry guarding within, it was very difficult for a person to approach the Orthodox Academy, yet who could have imagined that between these two powerful factions, a person had been drinking tea in the tea house near the Orthodox Academy for the entire night?

His walking out of the tea house was tantamount to breaking past the surveillance of the Imperial Court and arriving straight at the Orthodox Academy.

When Tang Thirty-Six saw the man, an extremely complex expression appeared on his face.

Beforehand, he had already known that somebody would come, but he had never imagined that it would be him.

This man came from Wenshui. He was the Second Master of the Tang clan.

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"Second Uncle, how did you get here?"

Tang Thirty-Six smiled at the man and asked, but internally, he was abnormally vigilant.

The situation in the capital was so tense that he knew the Wenshui Tangs would send someone, but he had never imagined it would be this man.

This was the person he had least wanted to see his clan send.

The Wenshui Tangs were the head of the Four Great Clans, possessing an unparalleled strength. The name of the Tang Old Master was enough to frighten half the world while the other half would grovel at his feet, but the reputations of the Tang Old Master's three sons did not even come close to his, or even to Tang Thirty-Six's. This was especially the case for the Tang Second Master. Many people didn't even know he existed.

The people of Wenshui City all knew. Every time a traveler from outside would mention Tang Thirty-Six's deeds in the capital and sigh about his hedonistic ways, the people of Wenshui City would also say with extreme disdain, "When compared that second uncle of his, how can he be called hedonistic? If you want to know how to write the words 'bankrupt the clan', you just need to see the Tang Second Master to know."

But it was all a pretense.

Only the direct descendants of the Tang clan knew how terrifying the Second Master was.

In the Tang clan, the Second Master had the highest talent in cultivation, and he was the one who had wasted his talent the most thoroughly. Years ago, when the then-Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy Zhuang Zhihuan paid a visit to Wenshui and met this man, he gave the following evaluation: "To be able to so squander such shocking talent, this person is truly too frightening."

This statement seemed utterly baseless, but it was actually the exact opposite.

A person that cared for nothing revered nothing, and this sort of person was the most terrifying.

Tang Thirty-Six was the sole grandson of the Tang clan and so was raised under the close attention of the entire clan, but even he was not willing to meet his second uncle.

Upon coming to the capital, he wasn't even willing to remember that he had such an uncle.

Tonight, the Tang Second Master had come to the capital and come downstairs.

This meant that the Tang clan had come downstairs and that they had taken a most callous stance, used a most merciless method, in this conflict.

This was the matter that Tang Thirty-Six found most unimaginable.

"What does the clan want to do?" he asked again.

The Tang Second Master waved a fan as he took measure of the Orthodox Academy's sights. He looked very much like some foppish young master, yet the words he spoke could never come out of the mouth of a foppish young master.

"It's impossible to stay out of it, so we have to do something. I thought this matter rather interesting, so I came."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Grandfather wasn't worried that Second Uncle would go crazy?"

The Tang Second Master folded the paper fan with a clap and gripped it in his hand, smiling, "Besides a madman like me, who can break through such a chaotic situation?"

Tang Thirty-Six's expression did not change, but his heart sank.

If either his father or his third uncle had come to the capital, he was confident he would be able to convince them using the importance of Chen Changsheng's safety. This was because the Wenshui clan should not know that Chen Changsheng only had a few days left to live, so if Chen Changsheng was able to survive this storm, he would be the successor with the strongest claim to the position of Emperor of the Great Zhou. To the Tang clan, this would be an extremely excellent outcome.

But the one who came was the Tang Second Master.

He was keenly aware that this second uncle of his had never cared about the life or death of any person.

"The capital is vast. Second Uncle didn't need to come to the Orthodox Academy," Tang Thirty-Six said.

The Tang Second Master calmly gazed at him, saying, "You are my Tang clan's only weakness in the capital. Before I set to the task, I naturally have to bring you away."

Tang Thirty-Six stared right into his eyes, saying, "Second Uncle just said that the capital is in chaos. As the superintendent of the Orthodox Academy, I can't just leave right now."

The Tang Second Master laughed.

His laugh was very special, particularly cheerful and open, his mouth opening extremely large without the slightest attempt to conceal it, but...there was no sound.

A noiseless laughter could be naive, guiltless, but it could also occasionally be very frightening.

"Ah, academy superintendent..." The Tang Second Master's smile vanished and he asked with an impassive expression, "You still haven't played enough?"

Hearing the word 'play', Tang Thirty-Six naturally thought of that conversation he had with Chen Changsheng on that autumn day under the Orthodox Academy's great banyan tree, and then he thought of how on the night before the Orthodox Academy came into conflict with the Tianhai clan, Luoluo was forced to move into the Li Palace's Green Leaf World.

In the eyes of their elders, everything these youths had done for

the Orthodox Academy had all just been playing.

Tang Thirty-Six thought of many things, but his expression did not change in the slightest. At some point, his hand stealthily made a gesture behind him.

The wind running through the darkness of the Orthodox Academy was suddenly tinged with the stench of blood. It was like some fierce beast had stealthily arrived at this place and was prepared to launch its most powerful assault at any moment.

Several dozen pure and cold sword intents rose up from the grass along the lake shore. In just a moment, they could form into an awe-inspiring sword array.

Scorn suddenly appeared on the Tang Second Master's face. At some point, he had come to Tang Thirty-Six's side, his right hand resting behind his neck.

Tang Thirty-Six felt this hand to be particularly cold and rather sticky, not like a snake, but like moss growing on a rock by a pond.

His heart sank.

He knew that his second uncle was terrifying, but he hadn't expected for him to be this powerful. In front of him, he was powerless to resist.

The Tang Second Master gazed through the darkness at the great

banyan tree, asking, "You are that wolf cub?"

Zhexiu emerged from behind the great banyan tree. His eyes were blood-red, his body exuding a ruthless Qi, the arms sticking out of his short sleeves covered in long fur. He had already completed his preparations for metamorphosis. The South Stream Temple disciples also appeared out of the darkness. Wielding longswords, they stared at the middle-aged man restraining Tang Thirty-Six, somewhat nervous and somewhat confused.

This middle-aged man should be from the Tang clan, yet for some reason, Tang Thirty-Six had sent out a secret signal to have all of them be prepared to strike.

Yet before either Zhexiu or the South Stream Temple disciples could do anything, the middle-aged man had very casually taken control of the situation.

Zhexiu glanced at Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six's expression did not change as he looked back, his meaning loud and clear—he didn't want to leave the Orthodox Academy, especially at this time.

Zhexiu moved his gaze to the Tang Second Master's face as he took one step forward.

"I loathe eyes like yours, too primitive, too barbaric, not cultured..."

The Tang Second Master gazed at Zhexiu and continued, "Usually, I wouldn't mind smashing all the bones in your body into pieces, but for the sake of my nephew, I won't do anything to you. But if you take one more step forward, or if those ladies from South Stream Temple raise their swords, then I'll just have to kill him."

Until now, Zhexiu and the South Stream Temple disciples still did not quite understand the situation, thinking, what use is there in restraining Tang Thirty-Six? Could it be that you're going to use him to threaten us? Then, they heard the man very calmly say exactly this, so calmly that although they found it impossible to believe these words, they were forced to believe it.

"He's your nephew," Ye Xiaolian said, looking at the Tang Second Master like he was some sort of monster.

The Tang Second Master gave a faint smile, saying, "He's my most beloved nephew."

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly said, "Second Uncle, isn't it true that you've always wanted me dead?"

"Where did such nonsensical and shameless words come from?" The Tang Second Master gently said to him, "This is Father's command. I have the full authority to handle this matter in the capital. Whether it's you or anyone else, as long as you disobey my orders, I can kill you on the spot. For this great undertaking that concerns the future of the clan, a few sacrifices are inevitable."

Tang Thirty-Six laughed, saying, "I'm the sole grandson of the Tang clan. If you kill me, how will you explain it to the clan?"

The Tang Second Master was truly rather perplexed. After a long period of thought, he seriously replied, "Then I'll just father another one."

Tang Thirty-Six no longer laughed, calmly looking at him and saying, "Father another one? It seems that Second Uncle really does want me to die."

The Tang Second Master smiled. "For the Tang clan, I and your third uncle never had children, loving and spoiling you, but we certainly didn't want to spoil you into a bear cub. Don't be willful."

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Chapter 634 – A Map Of The Capital

Hearing the words 'bear cub', Tang Thirty-Six recalled Xuanyuan Po. He smiled, but it was rather sourer this time.

He was still in the Orthodox Academy, but he was already beginning to miss the people who were no longer in the Orthodox Academy, as well as his time in the Orthodox Academy.

This period of time had truly been beautiful beyond compare, worthy of reminiscence. It was a pity that tonight, once he left, he would never return.

"I understand," he said to the Tang Second Master. "I'll go with you."

The Tang Second Master calmly gazed at him and gave another one of his silent laughs, his mouth gaping wide, his whole appearance rather comical.

After quite some time had passed, he finally restrained his smile. "This is very good."

With these four words, he took Tang Thirty-Six out the gates of the Orthodox Academy.

Zhexiu and the South Stream Temple disciples could do nothing but watch as their figures vanished into the darkness.

The Tang Second Master brought Tang Thirty-Six out of Hundred Flowers Lane onto the main street. An unmarked carriage was already waiting for them.

At this sight, the elite Imperial Guards monitoring the Orthodox Academy from the darkness grew slightly restless and then quickly calmed back down.

No matter if it was the Orthodoxy cavalry or the troops of the Imperial Court, they all acted like they did not see this carriage, did not see the Tang Second Master and Tang Thirty-Six boarding this carriage.

The Wenshui Tangs were just this terrifying of an existence.

Although on the surface, it seemed as if their power had not been able to penetrate into the capital for many years, in reality, they still possessed a high unimaginable influence.

Because the true item that could allow one to access godhood was not faith or strength, but money.

The carriage proceeded through the dark capital, its wheels imprinted with arrays making no sounds, whether they traveled across gray stone or red brick, seeming just like a ghost. Not even the Princess of Ping's flying carriage pulled along by pure white Pegasus across the sky was faster than this seemingly ordinary carriage.

The people within the carriage could not feel any bumps or jolts, yet it didn't feel at all comfortable to Tang Thirty-Six.

He asked, "Just what does the clan want to do?"

The Tang Second Master replied, "You'll find out soon."

Because they were traveling too quickly, the wind lifted the curtains of the carriage. As Tang Thirty-Six watched the streets fly by and saw the tightly shut entrances of stores, he silently pondered.

In the deepest depths of a market, the carriage stopped. This place was the general assembly of the Heavenly Fragrance Market.

Before entering a door which led underground, Tang Thirty-Six stopped and asked the Tang Second Master, "You want to take over the property the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets owns in the capital?"

The Tang Second Master slightly raised his brows, seemingly rather surprised that he was able to guess at the clan's true goal in such a short time.

"Even if the situation on the continent will be thrown into chaos, is the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets so easy to handle? What if the Elder of Heavenly Secrets comes to the capital?"

In order to deal with the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, one first had to resolve the problem that was the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

Even if the Tianhai Divine Empress invited the Elder of Heavenly Secrets to the capital to assist, for what reason did the Tang clan judge that the Elder of Heavenly Secrets would die?

It must be known that this elder who had the ability to clearly understand the heavenly secrets was also the head of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

"The Elder of Heavenly Secrets will not come to the capital." The Tang Second Master walked into the gloomy underground path, not turning his head as he spoke. "Because he is about to die."

Tang Thirty-Six's just-raised foot once more fell back down as he fell into a state of absolute shock.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets was about to die? Why?

"Of the experts of the Divine Domain in the current era, he and His Holiness the Pope are the two oldest. Since they are unable to achieve Concealed Divinity, they cannot escape the four words of 'birth', 'aging', 'illness', and 'death'."

The Tang Second Master continued walking as he calmly spoke. "In Mount Han, when he attempted to seal the Demon Lord, he was injured, quickening the process."

Tang Thirty-Six followed, asking, "Then what of the Divine Empress? Are all of you so sure that she will lose?"

The Tang Second Master explained, "The Tianhai Empress's strength relies on her ruthless heart. Chen Changsheng entered the capital two years ago, yet she never once moved. Even if she wants to kill him now, it's already too late."

The heavy iron door behind the pair slowly closed, cutting off the capital behind them.

The underground space here was very large but not at all gloomy, as there were Night Pearls and jade fire placed everywhere for light. It wasn't tranquil and serene either, as there were people everywhere.

Several hundred accountants were at their tables, copying something, calculating something. The table in front of each person was piled high with files.

"What are they doing?" Tang Thirty-Six asked.

The Tang Second Master replied, "What should our Tang clan most revere?"

Tang Thirty-Six could not think of an answer.

The Wenshui Tang clan was the wealthiest in the entire continent, with not even the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets being able to surpass them. Before the Chen Imperial clan established the Great Zhou Dynasty, the Tang clan was already the Tang clan. The

Tang clan was involved in every sort of business: military weapons, magical artifacts, rations and fodder, crystals, mines...if there was one thing that they most revered, could it be money?

They walked towards the room in the deepest part of this underground space. The three chief stewards of the Heavenly Fragrance Market here looked at Tang Thirty-Six behind the Tang Second Master, the looks on their faces rather unnatural.

They had been working on this matter for more than a year, but had never revealed it to him.

This was the Heavenly Fragrance Market, an opening that Tang Thirty-Six had torn open in the capital for his clan last autumn by borrowing the momentum of the Orthodox Academy's rebirth.

His clan had long since taken over everything in secret while he remained completely unaware.

He was busy handling the affairs of the Orthodox Academy, so to manage the Heavenly Fragrance Market, he naturally used the stewards sent by his clan, thus the Heavenly Fragrance Market very naturally became his clan's property.

Yes, he was the most pampered grandson of the Wenshui Tangs, yet during a major event like this, he still had no right to speak.

However, to these stewards, many years later, Tang Thirty-Six would inevitably become the master of the Tang clan. Although

what they were doing now was not betrayal, it wasn't much different, so they couldn't but feel somewhat uneasy.

"The Tang clan is forever the Tang clan's Tang clan, not any one person's Tang clan."

The Tang Second Master lifted the teapot on the table and took a drink from it, then he walked in front of the wall and said with his backs turned towards the three stewards, "Do this matter well and the Tang clan will not treat you all unfairly."

The three chief stewards glanced at Tang Thirty-Six and then softly affirmed.

The Tang Second Master lightly flicked the teapot and a map seven feet tall and wide dropped down from above to hang in front of the wall.

This map was constructed from the most durable golden silk and drawn with the most finely ground Southern Water Ink, the ink most likely mixed with some charcoal. Under the light of the Night Pearls and jade fire, it was exceptionally clear.

This was a map of the capital, drawn with the most meticulous detail. Whether it was the Imperial Palace, the Li Palace, or the most ordinary house, nothing was excluded.

The Tang Second Master carried the teapot in his left hand while he examined the map. His face revealed a satisfied expression.

"Report."

The three chief stewards lined up in order, took out thick files from their bosoms, and began to report.

"The Capital Garden of Harmony has been confirmed. Its strength has weakened by three-two-three."

"South Red House Street has been confirmed, its strength is at its starting number."

"North Li of Achieving Merit is impossible to confirm. On the day of Taizong's death, too many palace maids were buried with him. The Yin Qi might cause perturbations."

"White Paper District is confirmed, the strength has been increased by one-four-one."

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Chapter 635 – Two Imperial Designs Separated By One Thousand Years

With each line spoken by the three chief stewards, the corresponding place on the map lit up. Each point of light had a different level of brightness.

Tang Thirty-Six stood in a corner and listened, his expression growing increasingly solemn. He did not understand the numbers being reported, but he could sense the atmosphere.

The Tang Second Master gazed at those points of light as they gradually appeared on the map. He did not seem at all nervous, nor did he grow more relaxed with the passage of time.

To him, this seemed to be a very ordinary job.

After some time had passed, the three chief stewards finally concluded their report. The Tang Second Master gazed at the map and slightly creased his brow, somewhat dissatisfied. "Progress is still rather slow."

The clacking of abacus beads continuously rose up from outside the room. The simultaneous clacking of several hundred abacuses mixed together was truly not a very good sound.

A chief steward replied, "In this year of preparation, we were only able to obtain some rough estimates. The true calculations only began tonight. It's truly difficult to be any faster."

The Tang Second Master gazed out of the room at those accountants all immersed in their work, continuously moving the beads on their abacuses, and said, "Only one hour is left at most."

The chief steward replied, "I'll keep my eye on them."

"Just keeping an eye on them isn't enough." The Tang Second Master stared into the chief steward's eyes and ordered, "All of you also go. Also, give me an abacus."

An abacus and a large pile of files were promptly brought into the room.

The Tang Second Master paid no attention to Tang Thirty-Six in the corner. His right hand flipped through files while his left hand maneuvered the beads of the abacus. At intervals, he would momentarily pause to write a number on a file.

Compared to the accountants outside the room, his speed was not particularly fast, but every action of his was particularly clear. The speed at which his right hand flipped the pages and his left hand calculated united almost perfectly together under some incomprehensible tempo. Very quickly, he completed the calculations on the small mountain of files.

A subordinate brought in another pile of files.

These files were quickly calculated as well.

Only then did the Tang Second Master finally have a moment to rest. He took up from the table the teapot that had long since grown cold and slowly drank from it.

After completing such a vast number of calculations in such a short amount of time, he had turned somewhat blue. He had consumed far too much of his spiritual sense.

"If Xu Yourong were here calculating with her Fated Star Plate, she would probably be twice as fast as me."

The Tang Second Master tiredly put down the teapot and said, "But if Wang Po were still an accountant of our clan, there would be no need for me to go through such hardships."

At this moment, only he and Tang Thirty-Six were in the room, so he was naturally speaking to Tang Thirty-Six.

"Our clan does business, and when doing business, you can't take a loss. When Father let Wang Po leave Wenshui, this business took far too great a loss."

Tang Thirty-Six knew that his second uncle was warning him that he should not drag down the family business for the sake of Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy.

"Didn't Wang Po leave Wenshui because Second Uncle was narrow-minded and didn't like the look of him, so thought of every

way to force him out?"

He said mockingly to the Tang Second Master.

The Tang Second Master calmly gazed back at him, saying, "Shut your mouth. I still have many things to do today, and I'm in no mood to play these childish games with you."

The results calculated by the several hundred accountants were constantly being gathered in this small room and then organized into the simplest of sentences.

Just the two matters of whether each location in the capital could be confirmed or not, and the level of strength.

More and more lights appeared on the map hanging from the wall, gradually forming into lines, ultimately transforming into a mysterious design.

Standing in the corner, Tang Thirty-Six saw this design and faintly recalled that when he was very young and being told stories from long ago by the Old Master while sitting on his knees, a matter related to this had been spoken of...

But just what was it?

Finally, all the calculations were concluded, and that annoying sound of abacus beads clacking against each other finally ceased. All that could be heard was the panting accountants, extremely

exhausted and moaning from their aching arms. Tang Thirty-Six even saw two accountants who had used up too much of their energy and had fallen unconscious.

The Tang Second Master walked up once more to the stone wall, examining the design on the map. Perking his brows, he extended a hand and took an item out from his sleeve.

Countless rays of light shot out from this item and fell upon the map of the capital, similarly forming a design.

The two designs basically overlaid each other, the general outline generally the same. Only in certain tiny places was it somewhat different. In addition, the levels of brightness were different.

"Is the change large?" the Tang Second Master asked.

Tang Thirty-Six was somewhat surprised, thinking, I've never seen these two designs, so how can I answer? And these changes... what changes are being referred to here?

"One thousand years have already passed. The changes naturally won't be too small."

An elderly voice resounded through the shadows of the room, and an old man in a cotton jacket appeared there.

Tang Thirty-Six stared at the old man, asking in shock, "Great Guardian, how are you here?"

The old man nodded at him and then walked to the Tang Second Master's side. Gazing at the two overlaid designs, he said, "Fortunately, it can still be resolved."

Tang Thirty-Six could no longer suppress his curiosity. Walking over, he asked, "Just what is this design?"

"Both of these are the capital's Imperial Design. The design just calculated tonight is the present one. The one that Second Master just took out is the one from one thousand years ago."

This old Guardian from the Wenshui Tang clan replied.

The Tang Second Master added, "One thousand years of change in the capital lie within these two designs. This is history."

Hearing this, Tang Thirty-Six once more turned to the design on the wall, and what he felt from it now was naturally very different.

"Only our Tang clan can see the changes over this period of history, because our Tang clan exists within history. At least in the history of the capital, we have a longer one than anyone else, even more than the Chen Imperial clan, so our Tang clan has enough reason to return to the capital. You must understand the necessity of revering this history."

The Tang Second Master looked at him and said, "If you can't even understand this, how can you deserve the surname of Tang?"

This sentence was an answer to the question he had asked Tang Thirty-Six at the very beginning: "What should our Tang clan most revere?"

Not money that could let one access godhood, not the relationships that extended to every noble clan, sect, and government, and even to Xuelao City, but the incomparably long history possessed by the head of the Four Great Clans.

Logically speaking, Tang Thirty-Six should have had some sort of reaction towards these words, but he was thinking about other things. Then he thought about something that caused his face to instantly pale.

He recalled what these two designs separated by a thousand years on this map were.

Yes, it was the Imperial Design.

Just as the Great Guardian had said.

There were very few people in the world who knew of the Imperial Design's existence, but when he was small, he had heard about it on the Old Master's knees.

It was the greatest secret of the capital of the Great Zhou Dynasty, and also the mightiest and most terrifying Daoist array!

Just what did the Wenshui Tangs want to do? He stared at the map of the capital, countless waves surging in his mind. Tonight, were they planning to undertake such a large task?

The Tang Second Master and the Great Guardian were also gazing at this map.

All the lines of these two designs separated by one thousand years pointed to a single location.

Right at the place where the gazes of these three people rested.

The center north of this map of the capital, the Imperial Palace.

The Tang Second Master indifferently noted, "The pivot of the array really is there."

The Great Guardian sighed, "As it turned out, the pivot of the array was still there."

"From the moment Taizu founded the dynasty in front of the Mausoleum of Books, he began to set up the Imperial Design, and Taizong and Emperor Xian continued this work."

The Tang Second Master examined the map and noted, "The place altered the most, besides the lines that follow the canal at North Li of Achieving Merit, is the pivot of the array, deep within the Imperial Palace."

The Great Guardian looked at the bright spots on the second Imperial Design and said, "It now seems that all those rumors from the past were true. Taizong built the Lingyan Pavilion just so that he could transform the most critical and most vulnerable array pivot into the most dangerous Heavenly Slaughter Array, specifically targeted at experts of the Divine Domain."

The Tang Second Master commented, "Father said that if Emperor Taizong really did build a Heavenly Slaughter Array, even experts of the Divine Domain attempting to break in would only die."

The Great Guardian was quiet for a very long time, finally saying, "I will try and see if it's possible to sneak in."

Upon hearing this, Tang Thirty-Six was shocked once more.

The Great Guardian's cultivation was unfathomable, for many years being only half a step from the Divine Domain, was the Wenshui Tang clan's final divine card to play excluding the Old Master himself, and he was also going to take action?

Chapter 636 – The Monk By The Stream, The Daoist In The Rain

The Tang Second Master fell silent.

The Great Guardian noted, "Tonight, it is a certainty that Xue Xingchuan will remain in the palace to supervise the Imperial Design. That person has massive stores of Qi and blood, and he's currently at his prime. If he and I were to fight, I wouldn't have much chance of success. In addition, the Divine Empress is very likely to have handed the Frost God Spear to him, so his strength is infinitely close to the Divine Domain."

The meaning behind these words was very clear. If Xue Xingchuan held the Frost God Spear, then only experts of the Divine Domain could defeat him. With the Tang clan's resources accumulated over a thousand years, perhaps they really could request an expert of the Divine Domain to act, but the Heavenly Slaughter Array within the Imperial Palace was specifically targeted at experts of the Divine Domain.

Seeing this insoluble situation, only with the Great Guardian risking an assault could there be a hint of success.

The Tang Second Master remained silent.

The Great Guardian assessed, "The Guardian of the Qiushan clan is not as strong as me, the Prince of Xiang is a cunning old fox who certainly won't appear in the capital before the situation is settled, and the Prince of Zhongshan is a madman. Besides me, there is no

one else."

"No." The Tang Second Master shook his head. "Our Tang clan will always provide information, judgment, and money, but until the final moment is reached, we will not send a single person."

"Then who will break the Heavenly Slaughter Array? If we can't enter the Imperial Palace, then even if the Old Master himself came to the capital, there's no chance of obtaining the Imperial Design."

"That person said to the Old Master to let him handle this matter."

"With such great responsibility, to be suspicious of someone for this sort of matter has nothing to do with trust, but with ability."

The Tang Second Master defended, "Even I feel fear in front of that man, so believe that if he says he can do it, he can definitely do it."

He did not clearly state who this person was.

Tang Thirty-Six naturally could not know, but for some inexplicable reasons, he was very certain that the person being spoken of was Chen Changsheng's teacher, the once-Principal of the Orthodox Academy, Shang Xingzhou.

"Since the goal of everyone tonight is to invite the Divine

Empress to return to the sea of stars, why can't you just save Chen Changsheng while doing it?"

He did his utmost to make his voice calm and indifferent, showing that he didn't care that much.

But he could not conceal it from the eyes of the Tang Second Master, who replied, "These two matters have no relationship."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "If this is by direction of the Heavenly Dao, then having Chen Changsheng live might have some sort of effect on the Divine Empress's mind."

The Tang Second Master gave one of his silent laughs, then indifferently explained, "First, we are not acting as executors of the Heavenly Dao, but are discussing human concerns. Secondly, we are surnamed Tang, not Chen. We are not faithful officials or loyalists of those seventeen princes returning to the capital. Chen Changsheng's survival should not be for us to be concerned about, as we must ensure our own survival."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Then Second Uncle, did you ever think about what to do if we lose?"

The Tang Second Master smiled. "If that person can't break the Heavenly Slaughter Array and help us get into the Imperial Palace, then we will naturally return to Wenshui."

Tang Thirty-Six calmly replied, "You're just so sure that our Tang

clan won't be affected in any way?"

"Of course, because no person will see that we once appeared in the capital."

The Tang Second Master advised, "Don't forget my previous words. Our Tang clan will never do business that will make us suffer a loss."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "But you also mentioned Wang Po's name."

The Tang Second Master was not angered by these words. He sighed, saying, "Correct, besides Wang Po and Su Li, the two most disastrous business ventures the Old Master ever carried out in his entire life. If those two were here in the capital tonight—Su Li going to the Mausoleum of Books to hold down the Divine Empress, and Wang Po calculating the changes in the array, finding its weak points, and then going to the Imperial Palace with his single blade to fight a battle with Xue Xingchuan—why would our presence be required? The result? One insisted on living the life of an upright scholar with a poverty-stricken air, while the other person insisted on being a prodigal son living apart from the world yet still wasn't able to throw away a companion as beautiful as a flower. It's truly such a pity."

"I won't talk about how Wang Po was forced out of Wenshui by Second Uncle."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at his uncle and smiled, saying, "When

the Tang clan needed them the most, the both of them just so happened to not be here. Perhaps it was because they could see that our Tang clan, no, your Tang clan only knows how to calculate fingers and speak of money, making them feel only disgust, let alone any sort of reverence."

His smile was very innocent, pure, dazzling.

The Tang Second Master quietly looked back. Suddenly, he raised his right hand and whipped it at Tang Thirty-Six's face.

With a crisp slap, Tang Thirty-Six crashed against the wall. He was a miserable sight, the left part of his face swelling and a trickle of blood flowing from the corner of his lips.

Yet he was still smiling, smiling very happily, making it all the more dazzling.

"I said before, I don't want to play these childish games with you," the Tang Second Master said gravely to him.

Tang Thirty-Six swayed as he stood back up. Taking a handkerchief from his sleeve, he carefully wiped the blood from his lips and said, "No, it's because you know what I said is correct."

The Tang Second Master smiled at him. "You truly believe that your second uncle doesn't dare kill you?"

Tang Thirty-Six smiled back. "In the Orthodox Academy, I

already said before so many people, Second Uncle, that you've always wanted me dead. How can I think that you wouldn't dare kill me?"

Not waiting for a reply, he laughed and continued, "I believe the Old Master already knows of our conversation in the Orthodox Academy, and I also believe that Grandpa Great Guardian will also send this conversation back to Wenshui. After I get home, I'll also personally tell the Old Master of this matter, so if Second Uncle doesn't kill me today, it will truly be rather troublesome."

The Tang Second Master continued to smile. "You should know the Old Master's eyesight and temper better than anyone else."

Tang Thirty-Six laughed once more, saying, "Old people...no matter how good their eyesight, it's on the verge of getting cloudy. No matter big their temper, they still adore their only grandson. Second Uncle, even if you give birth to another and raise him to about my age, even with a sweet mouth like yours, you'll still need quite a few years, and I reckon that it'll be too late. So, Second Uncle, if you continue to live such a hedonistic life, or continue to silently endure, continue to act out the part of a hedonistic son even though everyone knows, perhaps you really have to kill me before I return to Wenshui, or else we won't be able to keep playing this game of you keeping me in the dark and me pretending to keep you in the dark."

As the two spoke, they were both smiling at each other, their faces both similarly handsome. Strangely, there was nothing harmonious about this picture, which instead caused others to shiver all over in fear.

What sort of uncle and nephew were they?

The Tang Second Master's smile finally faded. Looking at Tang Thirty-Six, he said, "This is forcing me to compete over the clan?"

Tang Thirty-Six laughed. "Our Tang clan...no, your Tang clan's favorite thing isn't using profit to control a person's heart? I also want to try."

Hearing this, the Tang Second Master once more noiselessly laughed, his mouth agape. He looked rather horrifying.

"Stop laughing like this, Second Uncle." Tang Thirty-Six's smile suddenly vanished as he earnestly said, "It's very foolish, truly like a blockhead."

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Because it was closer to the night sky, on normal days when the stars came out, the peak of the Mausoleum of Books should have been brighter. However, tonight, the night was filled with clouds and devoid of stars, and thus the darkness here was deeper than in any other place in the capital. The screen formed of clear light on the Divine Path was made even clearer by this contrast, making even the smallest detail visible.

Just now, Chen Changsheng had seen on this screen the Orthodox Academy and the middle-aged man very similar to Tang Thirty-Six. He did not know who this person was, but he could guess. However, he could not imagine what would happen between uncle and nephew, nor did he know what the people of the Wenshui Tang clan were prepared to do in the capital.

The Tianhai Divine Empress probably knew more, but she did not care.

She had known beforehand that the Tang clan absolutely would send someone, that the Tang clan should send someone. How could the old man on the banks of the Wenshui who had been suppressed by her supreme authority for more than two centuries possibly miss out on tonight's opportunity?

Everyone that should have come had come.

"Those who shouldn't have come have also come."

The Tianhai Divine Empress's gaze left the scenes in the darkness and shot into the distance.

The distance here was a place extremely far away.

Earlier, whether it was the appearance of Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke, Wuqiong Bi and Bie Yanghong, the seventeen rebellious princes, or the Four Great Clans, none of them had been able to cause a single flicker of change upon her face.

Yet when she turned her gaze to that distant place, her expression finally grew a little more solemn.

The capital sat in the center of the continent. The place farthest from here might be the Great Western Continent, or perhaps the islands in the Southern Sea, or the boundless snowy plains to the north of Xuelao City.

Or the Cloud Grave.

In the Cloud Grave was a solitary mountain, and three hundred li out from the solitary mountain was a sparsely inhabited village. This village was called Xining.

Outside this village was an old temple, behind the old temple a small stream. It was said that this stream flowed from the solitary mountain within the Cloud Grave.

At some point, a monk had appeared at the stream.

This monk was dressed in a monk's robes, covered in dust and tears yet giving off a transcendent air.

This monk had a handsome and delicate appearance. It was difficult to put a specific age on him, but he was probably middle-aged. At the corners of his eyes were a few faint wrinkles. His eyes were tranquil and clear, containing a boundless compassion and love. It seemed like they could see incomparably distant places,

could see everything.

This monk dipped his feet into the waters of the stream and sighed.

This sigh contained abnormally complex emotions.

His feet had already walked tens of thousands of li and he was too tired.

He and the rest of the members of his clan had been gone from this continent for almost one thousand years, too long.

A faint smile appeared on the monk's face. Rain suddenly began to fall from the sky above the stream.

The Cloud Grave was the final destination of all clouds and also the origin of all waters. This place was very close to the Cloud Grave, so this rain was the freshest rain.

Tens of thousands of li away, it also began to rain over the capital. The misty rain penetrated through the darkness, falling upon the streets and the mausoleum.

In the south of the city, on an ordinary street, a drifting strand of rain slightly deformed, rays of light refracting through it.

A Daoist walked out from the rainy night, out of empty air.

He stood in the dark street under the autumn rain, yet he gave off the feeling that he was not actually there.

He was at some place, any place in the world, his true position constantly changing and impossible to pin down.

The fine rain fell without a sound and on the two sides of this ordinary street, the people were all asleep. Not one person woke up.

Only he was awake.

The Daoist gazed further south towards the mountain mausoleum, his expression calm.

At the peak of the mausoleum, the Tianhai Divine Empress was quietly gazing through the darkness at him.

Chen Changsheng also saw the Daoist.

He silently cried out "Master", but he did not actually call out.

Because that Daoist did not look at him, only at the Tianhai Divine Empress.

He recalled that in his ten-odd years of life in Xining Village's old temple, his master would often only gaze at his senior brother, not

at him. It was like he had never existed in his master's eyes.

"Empress, just abdicate," the Daoist said as he gazed at the Mausoleum of Books.

Chapter 637 – We Simply Will Not

"Why?"

"Six hundred and seventy-seven years and three hundred and sixty-four days ago, you secretly left the Hundred Herb Garden to meet with me and my junior brother. At the time, you stated what you would do if we assisted Emperor Xian in ascending to the throne. Two hundred and fourteen years and sixty-nine days ago, Emperor Xian's eye disease increased in severity and he became incapable of sight, so he decided to have you represent him in correcting and criticizing the memorials to the emperor. When I and my junior brother were asked for any objections, you said that it was only temporary. This temporary period has now lasted for two hundred and fourteen years and sixty-nine days. Twenty years ago, before Emperor Xian returned to the sea of stars, you said to Emperor Xian that you would only hold court for a single year and then return the imperial throne to the Chen clan, yet..."

"Your meaning is that We should comply with our promise from back then and transfer the imperial throne...to one of these pieces of trash?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at the fifteen imperial carriages that had already entered the capital, and at the princes of the Chen Imperial clan within these carriages. A derisive smile appeared on her face.

"This is a very good reason. Acting for the sake of the so-called common people seems more important than any one person's promise, and you will also say that you must consider the

continued existence of the Tianhai clan."

The Daoist stood in the rain and looked towards the Mausoleum of Books, calmly saying, "Twenty years ago, these reasons could be used, but now they cannot, because I have already considered them for you."

The Tianhai Divine Empress drew back her gaze towards the scenes on the screen of light, saying, "Then in your view, who should We pass the throne to?"

The Daoist was on the screen, most likely on some street in the southern part of the capital, yet he was also somewhere else at the same time.

No person could be sure of his true position, because he was not at all guaranteed to have a true position. He was like a swallow in the rain, seeming to be within the rain but perhaps above it.

He said, "The imperial throne of the Great Zhou should be passed on to the sole son between you, the Empress, and Emperor Xian."

Chen Changsheng was right behind the Tianhai Divine Empress, but she did not turn around as she indifferently spoke, "Pass it on to this child about to die?"

"Emperor Xian had many sons, but Empress, you only have one, and he is the right and inevitable Crown Prince. In his body flows the blood of the Imperial clan, and also the blood of the Tianhai

clan. After he ascends, he will naturally care for his mother's family. If he inherits the imperial throne, the Imperial clan will have no objection, nor will the Tianhai clan. Isn't this just perfect?"

The Daoist continued, "The confluence of the north and south has already succeeded, the Great Zhou Dynasty's existence for many generations is assured, and the only matter left to be done is for the Empress to abdicate, nothing more."

'Abdicate, nothing more' was just three words and nothing more.

A fine 'nothing more'.

The Tianhai Divine Empress quietly gazed at the Daoist in the rain.

The Daoist quietly stood in the rain. He had said everything he wanted to say, so he no longer spoke, and the conversation between the two of them had most likely been heard by the entire continent.

For some reason, the Tianhai Divine Empress suddenly began to laugh, an extremely cheerful laugh, yet thick with ridicule.

"From the time two years ago that you sent him to the capital until now, you've seemed to always be doing one thing, to have Us see him."

Chen Changsheng sat on the ground, gazing at her tall and lofty back. Hearing her words, he realized that they were actually true.

No matter if it was the engagement with the Divine General of the East's estate, the new life of the Orthodox Academy, the Ivy Festival, or the announcement on the Divine Avenue, all the many events that had happened in that period of time now seemed for the sake of having him quickly mature while simultaneously placing him in the Divine Empress's gaze.

Many matters had been pushed along by Archbishop Mei Lisha, but behind him was inevitably the figure of that Daoist.

"Seeing him, there will be curiosity, a need to probe, suspicion."

The Tianhai Divine Empress held her two hands behind her as she gazed at the Daoist in the rain, slowly speaking to the rain-covered world. "He is just like an underripe fruit, bred and nurtured by the lot of you, then left for Us to quietly see, until finally, it ripened and exuded its fragrance. Anyone who smelled this fragrance would be overcome by the urge to eat him."

"To this entire world, this is the most alluring fruit, and to Us, it is even more the case."

Tianhai turned her head to glance at Chen Changsheng, then said, "This is the result most satisfactory to the cycle of the Heavenly Dao, the perfect conclusion to this set of causes and effects."

She turned to gaze at the entire world in the rain, a mocking smile dancing on the corner of her lips. "But...We simply won't eat."

The entire world was silent. In the Mausoleum of Books and in the capital, only the sound of rain splashing against the ground could be heard.

She continued, "This fruit of longevity perhaps can make a mortal an immortal, but presumably, it can only provide disadvantages to me."

Finally, she had a look of regret, sighing as she said, "An immortal bestowed on me a fruit of longevity...unfortunately, none of you are immortals, only humans, nothing more."

Humans, nothing more.

Nothing more.

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There is a garden in the Divine Kingdom, and in this garden is a tree, and from this tree hangs a fruit.

This fruit contains infinite amounts of vitality. By eating it, one

can transcend the mortal world, obtaining unimaginable spiritual experiences and gains.

This was a legend, a legend of the Sacred Light Continent.

The people of this world had probably never heard of it before, but he had.

By the stream, the monk who had come from afar slowly raised his head towards the distant capital, his clear eyes tinged with solemnity.

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The Daoist stood in the rain, still very calm, yet his true feelings were a mystery.

The surrounding street was very quiet. In the extremely dark night, people were still sleeping. Only he was awake, but was he lucid?

He had emerged from the empty air of the rainy night. From the moment he stepped out, not a single strand of rain could fall upon his Daoist robe, yet at this moment, several beads of water appeared on his hair, sparkling and clear.

Yes, that fruit of longevity was a scheme, a trap.

Besides the Canon of Flowing West concealed behind this entire matter, there was nothing too abstruse about it. It was very simple, not at all complex.

When he began designing this trap twenty years ago, he had very lucidly recognized this point.

This trap could never have been too complex, as it involved the mysteries of the Heavenly Dao. Moreover, the more complex the trap, the more prone it was to attract the vigilance of Tianhai and other similar figures.

But he believed that besides several gods in that distant continent, no person could see through the problems with this fruit of longevity, and neither could Tianhai.

And he also believed that this fruit of longevity presented the most irrepressible urge to any person, especially to Tianhai.

This was a lethal trap in accordance with the Heavenly Dao. There was not a single reason for it to fail.

Yet Tianhai did not fall into the trap.

She did not see the problems with the fruit of longevity, she only acted in accordance with her will.

Did she want to eat this fruit of longevity? Of course.

However, she was keenly aware that those people had wasted vast amounts of energy and twenty years of time to send him before her. On the surface, they had used the Canon of Flowing West to cut his age by three years, as if not wanting to have her find out who he was, but how could those people not know that she would certainly know who he was? So those people wanted precisely for her to eat him.

The entire world was quietly waiting for her to eat him.

The entire world was prepared to see her eat her own son.

So she just wouldn't eat.

Even if this fruit might have no problems at all, even if eating this fruit might truly allow her to break free of life and death and enter the true realm of Grand Liberation, she still would not eat it.

Not out of vigilance or prudence, but out of loyalty to her own will.

She was her will.

Her will was that if the entire world wanted her to do something, she would absolutely not do it.

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Behind Xining Village's old temple.

The monk vaguely understood something and slightly turned his head, looking upstream.

The night was dark and no lanterns were lit in the desolate village. Everything was pitch-black.

However, in his eyes, the surrounding sights were still clear as day. He could see the fish quietly floating in stone crevices, could see a petal gradually drifting away with the stream.

When the petal drifted towards his bare feet, it slowly turned.

He smiled and sighed.

Somewhat sorrowful, but not disappointed.

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"Perhaps longevity, perhaps a perpetual descent into an abyss—this is the gamble. Not eating him does not mean that your gaze can see through the supreme Heavenly Dao, only that you fear it."

The Daoist in the rain felt no disappointment, because it had only just begun.

He continued, "You know that this is the Heavenly Dao's trap. Your opponent is not me, but the Heavenly Dao, so you don't even dare to step onto the stage."

Hearing this, the Tianhai Divine Empress's brows slightly perked like a Phoenix about to take flight.

"Since you fear the Heavenly Dao, how can you not be afraid of the Heavenly Dao's backlash?"

The Daoist calmly said to her, "Don't forget that when you swore the blood oath to the starry sky, I was also there."

"Even if the Heavenly Dao descends, the person to die is still him."

The Tianhai Divine Empress calmly continued, "We will personally watch as he dies, ensuring that absolutely nothing out of the ordinary occurs."

The Daoist sighed, "As expected, you are still the world's most cold-hearted person."

The Tianhai Divine Empress replied, "The same to you."

The two spoke as if they were standing right in front of each other, yet they were actually separated by several dozen li, and at times it even felt like several thousand li.

Because the Daoist's position in this world was still illusory and ethereal, impossible to pin down.

Chen Changsheng also did not know his position in this world.

He had once believed that he was a young Daoist of Xining Village's old temple, his master's student, yet he now discovered that he was nothing but a fruit.

If eaten, he would have some value. If not eaten, then he would be disregarded, only able to wait until he fully ripened, fell and turned into pulp.

He was the Tianhai Divine Empress's own son, but she was so calmly watching him die.

Logically speaking, the two people carrying out this conversation before the entire world should have been the two people he was closest with.

One was his birth mother, the other the master who had raised

him into a man.

Yet when they spoke, they did not even give him a glance.

When speaking of cold-heartedness, who had ever felt it more vividly, deeply, than he had tonight?

This indifferent, sorrowful, and somewhat laughable feeling—what sort of feeling was it?

It bored into his bones.

A pain akin to something boring into his bones exploded out from every part of his body in a very short amount of time.

With several small pops, the needles in his neck were sent flying, deeply stabbing into the stone tiles.

His blood containing limitless energy flowed between his internal organs like a surging deluge.

The leftover true Qi in his ruptured meridians scattered, incessantly seeping into his bones and flesh.

Spider webs of cracks began to appear on his internal organs.

His face was pale.

He was in terrible pain.

He was going to die.

Chapter 638 – At the Time, I Was Already Confused

(TN: A reference to a poem called 'The Brocade Zither' by Tang Dynasty poet Li Shangyin. This line comes from the end, which translates as, 'Why wait to recollect these emotions? Just that at the time, I was already confused.')

The Daoist that had appeared from midair in the rainy night was precisely the previous Principal of the Orthodox Academy, Shang Xingzhou, and also the extremely enigmatic Daoist Ji of Taizong's era.

He was the leader of this undertaking in the capital, the principal schemer.

After he appeared, the only thing that he could be heard between the heavens and earth was his conversation with the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Whether it was Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke or those fifteen princes that had already entered the capital, they all maintained their silence. This represented their respect, or perhaps their awe.

But the heavens and earth were vast, the world enormous, so there would always be one or two voices, there would always be some other voices appearing.

"What need is there for this?"

A voice emerged from a canal to the southeast of the capital.

The large ship sailing along the canal slowly came to a stop.

The expression of the old Daoist nun at the bow of the ship suddenly shifted. Like lightning, her arm stretched out, yet all she snatched was air.

The different shade of red that had been rippling in the gloomy waters of the canal from the start was now gradually fading.

Just then, a streak of light suddenly appeared in the night sky outside the Mausoleum of Books, clearly revealing the drops of rain descending from the sky, and also shining upon a figure.

This light was not a thunderbolt striking down from the dark clouds, but the Qi emitted by the meeting of this figure with the restriction over the Mausoleum of Books.

This figure slowly drifted down from the rainy sky, landing in the river outside the Mausoleum of Books.

It was a middle-aged scribe, his gown already soaked through with rain, yet his appearance did not seem the slightest bit dispirited. His calm eyes exuded an enchanting air of grace.

A bright red flower was tied to the pinkie finger of his right hand and was currently lightly bobbing in the rain.

Bie Yanghong.

This expert of the Divine Domain was also unable to break through the restriction of the Mausoleum of Books and was sealed outside.

But since he had already spoken, he would continue to speak.

There was a sharp crack.

Bie Yanghong's body instantly became illusory as a clear path appeared through the heavy curtains of rain. On the river outside the Mausoleum of Books appeared an extremely straight line of white-capped waves.

In a breath, he had intruded into the Mausoleum of Books and reached the very top of the Divine Path, in front of that stone plain.

But he could not proceed any further forward, because the Tianhai Divine Empress glanced at him.

A lightning bolt descended from the sky and fell on Bie Yanghong's body.

A dazzling ray of blazing white light instantly converted all the water in the canal into steam, while several extremely thick scorch

marks appeared on the firm black stone.

Bie Yanghong gazed up at the end of the Divine Path, at the summit of the Mausoleum of Books, his expression grave.

Just a moment ago, he had sensed the Qi of the world faintly change and so had halted his steps. Otherwise, he really might have been struck by the lightning bolt and been heavily injured.

The Tianhai Divine Empress had only glanced at him.

The level of strength she had revealed was far too frightening, already giving off the faint sense that she could mobilize the laws of the world!

Everyone knew that the Tianhai Divine Empress's cultivation was unfathomable, but only now did they realize that all their speculations had still underestimated her!

On the official road to the northwest, Guan Xingke raised his head and pushed up his bamboo hat, revealing a plain and unremarkable face and two eyes tinged with fear.

In the wheelchair, Zhu Luo calmly looked in that direction, his left hand lightly rapping against the sheath of his sword. At present, it was his only hand.

"The capital is Our stage. You should not have chosen this place."

The Tianhai Divine Empress calmly declared to the world.

Bie Yanghong had halted his steps, but he still continued to speak. "No matter where, we still had to come."

"We hoped that you would not come." The Tianhai Divine Empress turned to him and calmly said, "We do not wish you to die."

Bie Yanghong replied, "Since I study the holy books, I must always seek peace of mind."

The Tianhai Divine Empress praised, "Truly worthy of Bie Yanghong. Our heart is consoled. Amongst these people, We have always felt you to be rather decent, a different color, a different bearing."

The rain suddenly grew disorderly, transforming into countless ripples. The white-capped waves in the river outside the Mausoleum of Books suddenly grew much more chaotic, the Qi a little out of sorts.

The Daoist nun had also arrived at the Mausoleum of Books. She stood by Bie Yanghong's side, her gaze warily looking upwards.

"The most bewildering thing you have done in your entire life is to marry this thing."

The Tianhai Divine Empress mockingly said to Bie Yanghong.

The Daoist nun was his wife, Wuqiong Bi, similarly of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

Wuqiong Bi was furious at this comment, feeling that both the sound of the rain and the sound of that woman's voice were equally vexing, yet she dared not express it.

At this time, Bie Yanghong also could not say much. After a momentary pause, he said, "Empress, since he is bound to die, why does Empress not give him a single joy?"

He did not say all he wanted to say.

The part he did not say was: And then, we can battle to our hearts' delight.

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Very rarely, [joy could be understood as pain and delight](#).

(TN: The Chinese term for joy/delight/happiness used here is 痛快, which can be divided into 痛, 'pain', and 快, 'joy', or in this case, 快哉, which can be translated as 'delight'.)

Chen Changsheng was presently in terrible pain and could not feel the slightest delight, [even if the wind weaving through the rain came from a thousand li away and was growing stronger and stronger.](#)

(TN: This seems to be a reference to a poem by Su Dongpo, '黄州快哉亭赠张偓佺'. In particular, it references the last line, 'With a little noble spirit, one can enjoy the delightful wind from one thousand li away'.)

Upon hearing Bie Yanghong's words, the Tianhai Divine Empress slightly turned her body to glance at Chen Changsheng. It was only an apathetic glance, yet she was able to get an extremely clear picture of the state of his body.

According to the Elder of Heavenly Secrets's calculations, before he was even born, his sun wheel had been destroyed, his nine meridians severed.

The present Chen Changsheng had all seventy-two of his meridians completely shattered, his three hundred and sixty-five Qi openings all torn open.

He was currently suffering an unimaginable pain, just as he had in her womb, but the him at that time had been unaware and unfeeling. The only person in the world that could sense the pain he was feeling was her.

The Tianhai Divine Empress thought of the pain when he was in

the womb, the pain when he was born, and slightly creased her brow, somewhat annoyed.

The rain gradually increased, yet there were still stars faintly twinkling, and that calm, clear, and soft splendor.

Guan Xingke, pushing the wheelchair holding Zhu Luo, had also arrived at the Mausoleum of Books.

Four of the Eight Storms had arrived.

The Daoist was some place in the dark rains.

The monk was by the stream tens of thousands of li away.

Everything in the capital tonight had all been part of the Tianhai Divine Empress's plan. At this moment, everyone had arrived, so Chen Changsheng's existence ceased to have value. So naturally, he could die now.

The rain pouring from the sky increased in volume, forming into lines and then gradually into torrents. The wind carried along with the rain also grew greater and greater.

Deep within the storm came the rumbling of thunder, the occasional real lightning bolt flashing in the night sky, illuminating the scene at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood at the edge of the Divine Path, her hands behind her back, no excess emotion on her sublimely beautiful face as her black hair danced behind her. She was like a demon or god.

The torrential rain was incapable of wetting her hair, but it drenched Chen Changsheng's clothes.

Chen Changsheng's face was pale, his body soaked. He looked abnormally feeble, pitiful.

He gasped for breath, using his hands to push himself out of the puddles on the ground. With great difficulty, he raised his head towards her.

At this moment, he was truly very calm, because he was already numb. To this world, he had already lost all hope.

The Tianhai Divine Empress perceived his actions and indifferently commented, "Yourong wished to save you. I sent her away."

When she said this, she did not turn to look at him.

Chen Changsheng's body, which had grown somewhat numb because of the cold, pain, and disappointment, grew somewhat softer at these words, a tiny speck of warmth still left in the pit of his stomach.

Yes, there are still people in the world that care about me, like Yourong, or the people in the Orthodox Academy, or Luoluo in the distant White Emperor City, or Senior whose location I don't know...

"Thank you, my lady," he said to the Tianhai Divine Empress's back.

He was thanking her for saying those words at the final moment of his life, thus helping him remember that there was still some beauty in life.

This way, when he left, he might be somewhat unwilling because of his reminiscence, but at least he would not be sad because there was nothing to reminisce about.

The rain grew greater and greater, flowing down the Mausoleum of Books along the two sides of the Divine Path. Gradually, it transformed into a waterfall of astonishing power.

The sound of rain in the night was vexing, but a torrential rain was disastrous. In the forest, many beasts could faintly be seen hiding away, yet it was no longer possible to hear the chirping of autumn insects.

A squirrel was leaping and weaving through the forest, seemingly seeking out a place suitable to hide from the rain, yet unable to find one, so it was quickly soaked through. The rain was too great, so much so that the squirrel's originally oily and waterproof tail was unable to completely endure it. The fluffy tail drooped down,

the gray fur clinging wetly to its body. It was a very pitiable sight.

If that tail were dry and fluffy, perhaps this squirrel might look very fat.

Just like the squirrel in the forest of the Hundred Herb Garden.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's gaze followed the squirrel through the forest for a very long time before finally looking away.

The experts had already gathered within the Mausoleum of Books. Under the seemingly calm surface of the dark capital in the rain, many undercurrents were flowing.

Her reign over the Great Zhou Dynasty was currently confronting its most forceful challenge.

Yet at this time, she was attentively watching a squirrel hide from the rain.

Just what was she thinking?

"Two years ago in the palace, you should have seen a squirrel."

She suddenly said these sorts of words.

These words had no head or tail.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat dazed, mystified as to what she was saying.

Then, in his daze, he remembered some things.

That was truly a matter from a long time ago. Two years ago, on the night of the Ivy Festival, he had been lured by Mo Yu into a cold palace and imprisoned by the Tong Palace array. In order to escape, he had risked entering an underground space through the gate of life. He encountered the Black Dragon and, with great difficulty, returned through a pool in the Imperial Palace.

At the time, a middle-aged woman had been standing by the pool, perhaps preparing to wash her hands or wash her clothes.

At the time, he emerged from the pool with an extremely sorry appearance, his clothes utterly soaked, and it was even late at night. The middle-aged woman seemed startled and took one step back, her wooden clogs clicking against the gray stones.

At the time, in the forest by the pool, a squirrel was eating. Leaping up in fright, it threw down the fruit and leaped to the second floor of the side palace, running along the balcony, its swaying tail brushing against a flower pot.

At the time, the middle-aged woman had been right below the flower pot.

At the time, Chen Changsheng had just escaped from dire straits and was still deep within the palace. He was in an extremely tense situation where he could not be found by others, but upon seeing this scene, he didn't even need to think before rushing over.

He hugged the middle-aged woman to his chest and curled around her. This way, even if the flower pot fell, it would only shatter against his back and not on the woman.

Fortunately, the flower pot did not fall.

Now that he thought about it, none of it had been real, because she was no middle-aged woman, but the Tianhai Divine Empress. How could she be startled?

Were his actions at the time excessive and laughable in her eyes?

But why was she suddenly mentioning that squirrel at this moment?

As he thought of that time, Chen Changsheng felt a little confused.

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Chapter 639 – Crying Out At The Center Of The World

"At the time, why did you run over?"

"Because I was afraid you would be injured by the falling flower pot."

"Even though, at the time, you were deep in the dark palace and being discovered would bring great troubles on yourself?"

"I didn't have time to think."

"Even though, at the time, you were in a hurry to get to Weiyang Palace and attend the Ivy Festival, take out the marriage contract, and destroy the Qiushan clan's marriage proposal?"

"I didn't think that far."

"Three squirrels."

"What?"

The peak of the Mausoleum of Books was shrouded in torrential rains.

Yet the sound of Chen Changsheng's conversation with the

Tianhai Divine Empress was not drowned out by the rain.

He did not understand what she meant by those words. 'Three squirrels'?

The Tianhai Divine Empress watched the squirrel gradually vanish into the rain, remaining silent for a very long time.

The first time she met Chen Changsheng, there was a squirrel.

Just now at the Orthodox Academy, there was a squirrel.

And now, there was another squirrel.

When she saw the first squirrel, he was in a very troublesome situation, yet he disregarded everything to come and save someone.

When she saw the second squirrel, he was in a very dangerous situation, yet he only thought about requesting that she release Liu Qing and those Li Palace priests, completely abandoning all so-called stubbornness and pride.

When she saw the third squirrel, he was in a most despairing situation, on the verge of being killed by her, yet because she had said those words, he had very earnestly thanked her.

Just what sort of youth was this?

An extremely complex set of emotions appeared on the Tianhai Divine Empress's face. It was somewhat mocking, somewhat disdainful, somewhat angry, somewhat disgusted. Ultimately, it all transformed into apathy.

"Such softheartedness, you're actually quite similar to your father. How did I give birth to a useless son like you?"

After saying this, a tinge of apprehension flashed across her beautiful face and then quickly transformed into an unimaginably fiendish intent.

There were no words, no sign, not even a glance at him. She raised her right hand and slammed it down against the crown of his head.

In the pitch-black night, a lightning bolt seemed to trail behind her right hand as it descended like a mountain.

Countless cries of shock arose in the dark capital, each holding different emotions but all similarly stunned.

No person imagined that she would strike out like this.

Boom!

A clap of thunder seemed to boom out from the peak of the

Mausoleum of Books.

Countless lightning bolts flashed and then crashed down upon the Mausoleum of Books.

The torrential rain poured down, the darkness like ink. Occasionally, it would be torn apart by a descending lightning bolt, revealing an indistinct scene.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood, facing the violent storm.

Her right hand had fallen on Chen Changsheng's head.

A powerful and terrifying strength and a divine and masterly Qi almost simultaneously appeared in the world.

This strength originated from the Tianhai Divine Empress's body.

This Qi came from the Mausoleum of Books at her feet, and even from the entire world.

These were the world's most supreme strength and Qi, attracting countless phenomena, thunder booming in the frenzied winds and torrential rains.

This strength and Qi met in her body and then entered Chen Changsheng's body through her right hand.

The coming of a storm.

Instantly, the seventy-two shattered meridians in Chen Changsheng's body were crushed into powder, the three hundred and sixty-five Qi openings all destroyed. The deep wounds on the surface of his internal organs deepened and blood madly surged through his body.

The remaining star radiance still hiding in the niches of his meridians and the depths of his Qi openings was also incapable of hiding from this storm, all forced out.

Countless powder-like fragments of starlight emerged from the depths of his body onto his skin, penetrating through his soaked Daoist robe, emitting a pitiful and dull light.

No matter how fierce the rains, they still could not wash away that star radiance.

No matter how unbridled the winds, they could not drown out his cries of pain.

A moment later, his mind and will were crushed into powder by the storm. He could no longer endure and cried out in pain!

His cries pierced through the raging wind and rain, spreading throughout the entire Mausoleum of Books and then to even further places.

This cry was hoarse and torn, containing limitless pain. It was like a young beast calling out for help, invoking a feeling of absolute despair.

Everyone that heard his cries could feel his current emotions and situation. Friend or foe, they were all taken with the impulse to cry.

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Yu Ren had been in the Mausoleum of Books this entire time.

He was viewing the monoliths.

When those important figures and peerless experts were speaking several li away, even several thousand li away, all the common people of the capital could not hear it, and so naturally, neither could he.

As a drizzle began to descend from the night sky, he took two steps with the assistance of his walking stick to get under the monolith hut, borrowing its roof to avoid the rain, and then continued examining the lines on the monolith.

The storm gradually worsened, the darkness fell heavier, and he

continued to head deeper into the monolith hut. Since he couldn't see, he used his hand to feel the lines on the stone monolith.

No matter how furious the storm, it could not affect his thoughts of viewing the monolith.

From time to time, a flash of lightning would illuminate the surface of the monolith, but even this could not rouse him from his trance of viewing the monoliths.

Until the cries of pain spread throughout the Mausoleum of Books, spread to the monolith hut, fell in his ears.

Yu Ren seemed to be struck by lightning, his face turning abnormally pale.

Because he recognized that these were the cries of his junior brother.

He could hear from these cries that his junior brother was in deep pain, deep despair.

He turned towards the direction of those cries.

He was currently at a very high place in the Mausoleum of Books. The only place higher was very likely to be the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

He stopped thinking, hobbling towards that direction with all his might.

That walking stick that had accompanied him for twenty years quietly lay in the monolith hut, awaiting his return.

The higher one went in the Mausoleum of Books, the more precipitous the terrain, the more difficult to climb it became. Moreover, shrubs were scattered everywhere, the torrential rains had made the rocks incredibly slippery, and the mountain fields had all been turned to mud, increasing the difficulty.

Let alone the fact that he was a person who only had full use of one leg.

But he cared about none of this. He thrust his hand into the crevices, used his feet to step on the muddied ground and tree roots, doing his utmost to climb to the peak.

He only had one hand, and one of his feet was rather deformed.

His hand was very quickly hurt, his fingernails torn off.

His legs were also on the verge of being scraped open.

As he climbed, he left traces of blood behind, but they were quickly washed away by the pouring rain.

He should have been in great pain, but he could not feel it.

His actions were very dangerous, but he did not notice.

His junior brother's cries were still echoing through the mausoleum, so he only knew that his junior brother was in great pain and anger.

Suddenly Yu Ren stopped.

The raging storm had suddenly ceased, and no more lightning descended from the sky.

The cries had also vanished.

In the entire Mausoleum of Books, in the entire world, there was not a single sound, only the silence of death.

This mountain mausoleum seemed to have become a true mausoleum.

He suddenly felt great fear in his heart, his body turning cold.

He turned to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, giving out two cries of pain.

He could not speak and his cries were somewhat strange:

aaaaaaaah, like a child.

Like a wronged and impatient child.

Then he wiped off the muddy water, or perhaps tears, off his face, and continued to climb towards the peak.

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Chen Changsheng quietly lay on the ground, his body utterly drenched, his eyes tightly shut, no movement visible.

Those fragments of starlight that had drifted out of his body could not be washed away by the torrential rain, but now they dispersed with the night wind, returning to nothingness.

The rain stopped and the clouds scattered. Watery starlight descended over the peak.

The Tianhai Divine Empress silently gazed at the profuse stars in the night sky, her hands clasped behind her.

She stood in front of him, blocking out the starlight, and also blocking out what lay behind this vast sky of stars: fate.

"In the future, do not do such absurd things."

The Tianhai Divine Empress's voice was rather tired, an extremely rare sight.

She and Chen Changsheng were the only two people on this peak.

Chen Changsheng was already dead.

Who was she speaking to?

Chen Changsheng opened his eyes and awoke.

His face was pale and he was feeble beyond compare, constantly coughing out rainwater.

He gazed at her back, saying nothing for a very long time. Finally, he said, "Thank you."

The Tianhai Divine Empress did not turn her head as she replied, "You're welcome."

(TN: The title of this chapter, '在世界中心呼唤', is part of the title for a Chinese movie, excluding only a single word, '在世界中心呼唤爱', crying out in love from the center of the world.)

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Chapter 640 – Stars Hang Over Vast Open Plains

(TN: A reference to the poem '旅夜书怀' by the poet Du Fu. The full line is 'Stars hang over the vast open plains, the moon surges with the flow of the great river'.)

When the entire world believed Chen Changsheng's life to be very good, only he knew that there was not much left of his life.

When the entire world, including himself, believed that he would die without a doubt, he lived.

He had not died.

He was lying in the rainwater at the summit of the Mausoleum of Books, his face pale and his body extremely weak, but he did not die.

The entire world was quiet and still.

As the torrential rains had wreaked havoc in the darkness, as flashes of lightning cast their terrifying light over the Mausoleum of Books, the Tianhai Divine Empress had brought her palm down upon Chen Changsheng's head, not to kill him, but save him.

Now, the rain had grown extremely light, silently moistening all things.

The people of the capital were still asleep and unwaking.

Daoist Ji stood on the rainy street, gazing up at the Mausoleum of Books, thinking to himself, just who is the person that is truly awake?

He had not expected that the situation would change in such a manner.

Starting from six hundred years ago, two hundred years ago, twenty years ago, he had been preparing for this night, on guard against this night, scheming for this night.

For this night, he had laid down countless backup plans, carried out his preparations to perfection. Whether the Tianhai Divine Empress chose to kill Chen Changsheng or eat Chen Changsheng, it was all in his plan.

The true lethal stroke of this plan was still in the drenched forest of the Mausoleum of Books, its existence undiscovered.

The Tianhai Divine Empress was the current master of the Great Zhou Dynasty, so there was no problem whatsoever with her calling the Mausoleum of Books her stage.

But he was the successor to the legitimate line of the Orthodoxy, so the Mausoleum of Books was similarly his stage.

He had already made many preparations. After she killed Chen Changsheng, he would reveal the entire truth of the matter, shaking her soul and will. Then, using the limitless Sacred Light released with Chen Changsheng's death, he would incite a response from the Heavenly Dao, making a sacrifice to the starry sky to invite down a divine punishment and execute her right where she stood.

But...Tianhai did not kill Chen Changsheng, nor did she eat Chen Changsheng.

So even if he were to now reveal the truth, he could not make a crack in her Dao heart.

Chen Changsheng was still alive, so he was naturally unable to use the Sacred Light within his body to invite down a divine punishment.

There were many things that Daoist Ji did not understand. Why did she save Chen Changsheng?

In the end, was it still the principle that even a vicious tiger would not eat its cubs? No person believed that the Tianhai Divine Empress cared about this, at least he would not.

Could she really not be afraid of the backlash from the Heavenly Dao?

He calmly and silently gazed into the distance, understanding

something: the choice had already been made, and its effects were just beginning to appear.

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Chen Changsheng was clearest on the changes in his body and knew just what exactly had happened.

When the violent storms had been washing his body, the snaking bolts of lightning illuminating the pitch-black world, the Tianhai Divine Empress, without turning to look at him, had raised her right hand, carrying countless storms and the might of a mountain range, and brought it down on his head. Thus, the mighty power of the world and an ageless Qi poured into his body.

In an instant, truly only an instant, an instant so quick that there was not even time to think, his body completely shattered. Whether it was those internal organs that were already riddled with countless wounds, his already tattered and ruptured meridians, or his Qi openings, they were all shattered, blending into his blood and bones.

Everything happened within an extremely short span of time, but in Chen Changsheng's perspective, it was like a hundred years had passed. In this instant where there was not even time to think, he experienced far too much pain. This pain took on countless forms, countless flavors, all mixing together and transforming into countless little knives. Through innumerable angles and methods,

they cut away at the deepest part of his soul.

This was not the end, but the beginning.

In an instant, truly only an instant, an instant so quick that there was not even time to despair, his body began to reform. Whether it was those internal organs that had been rendered into petal-like shards, the meridians that had been ground into sand, or those shapeless Qi openings that were already too terrible to behold, under the joint effort of the magnificent power and ageless Qi, they began to aggregate and then take form.

In the instant between the two aforementioned instants, of his entire body, only the surface remained intact. Within, he was already a sea of blood.

Gradually, white lotuses began to bloom from the sea of blood. These were bones. Then, coral began to bloom. This was flesh. Then branches and tendrils began to sprout, the meridians, and then leaves began to bud, the Qi openings.

The crushed internal organs, meridians, and Qi openings gradually regained their form, once more returning to his body.

If someone were there to witness this sight, they would certainly lose their voice from the shock of such a miracle.

To Chen Changsheng who had to endure all this, this was a most excruciatingly painful process.

When describing extreme pain, the phrase 'pain that cut to the marrow' was often used, but his bone marrows had all been shattered and then condensed back into small streams.

There was also another phrase, 'pain that thrust deep into the heart', but his heart had also been shattered and then gradually floated back up from the sea of blood.

This was destruction, also reincarnation, or rebirth. This was to change the heavens and reshape the earth, to put a new face on the sun and moon. Yet all of this occurred in one person's body.

Let alone him, even Zhexiu would find it impossible to endure this pain.

The stormy capital resounded with his cries of pain. Those were his attempts to resist this pain.

At the moment, his mind had long since grown numb to the pain, so much so that it was almost on the point of growing lax. If this occurred, then even if he awoke, he would be rendered an idiot.

A more likely possibility was that his sea of consciousness would shatter and he would noiselessly die in this process.

It was very obvious that the Tianhai Divine Empress did not care if he was able to endure all this. This was something she simply wished to do.

With an indifferent expression, she coldly gazed into the rainy night, her right hand lightly resting on his head, continuing to bestow upon him the most benevolent gift, the cruelest torture.

Fortunately, perhaps because of the honing of the sea of sword intent, or because of Zhexiu's example, or because of that night many days ago when the Tianhai Divine Empress dabbed his brow with a drop of tea in the autumn forest of the Hundred Herb Garden, or because of that tinge of unwillingness that had always resided in the deepest depths of Chen Changsheng's soul, he managed to hold on.

After many long and numberless nights, he woke up.

Of the magnificent power and ageless intent, some still coursed through his body. The process had concluded, but the pain persisted. Innumerable extremely cold and seemingly real knives were unsympathetically piercing through his body, continuing to scrape away at his bones and flesh, mind and will.

He was in extreme pain. These were the aches of the body.

He felt that every part of his body, from the hair of his head to the nail of his toe, was being gnawed on by countless ants.

He did not have a single speck of strength, not even to open his eyes. He could only perform Meditative Introspection.

With a tiny stimulation of his spiritual sense, he began to observe the changes in his body.

It was a somewhat familiar scene, but it had also undergone massive transformations.

The lake suspended in the sky was still clear, his spirit mountain still lonely and silent. The gate of his Ethereal Palace was still wide open, several yellowed fallen leaves on the steps in front of the gate as if no one had visited for a very long time.

A thin mantle of snow covered the wasteland. It was very loose, one puff of wind away from being swept clear. It was probably the star radiance that had just descended.

Where the snowy plain originally stood was icy water gradually accumulated from thawed snow, slowly flowing through the plains. Those thin trickles of icy water converged into streams, and then rivers, all proceeding forward.

In front...there were no fractured cliffs, no dried-up riverbeds, no endless abysses, only...a flat plain!

Chapter 641 – Ten Thousand Li Away In The Span Of Several Breaths

What did this flat plain mean? Could it mean that all his severed and blocked meridians were already repaired?

Chen Changsheng stared in shock at the scene before him.

Countless great rivers flowed freely across the plain, irrigating the rice paddies on both their banks.

Many lakes were dotted sporadically across this plain, both big and small.

Clear and elegant mountains and rivers, beautiful sights, myriad scenes, were currently in his body.

It turned out that this was what normal meridians looked like.

It turned out that this was what perfect Qi openings looked like.

It turned out that true Qi flowing through the meridians should have been this smooth and unhindered, not the slow and congealed flow that he had always felt in the past.

Chen Changsheng stared in amazement. Before he even had time to feel joy, he became sentimental.

Yes, he was still alive, and now it seemed that he would live even better than he had in the past.

His illness...seemed to truly be cured.

There was no more curse.

Fate had been knocked to the ground.

Although he was still in Meditative Introspection, he could sense that his body had become much lighter, as if it had shed countless burdens.

On the horizon before him, that shadow that had been his constant companion for seven years was no more, only beautiful mountains and rivers, infinite light!

He opened his eyes.

And saw her figure.

She held her hands behind her back as she stood on the edge of the Divine Path, gazing into the night sky, her clothes somewhat damp.

In the distant night, one final extremely thick lightning bolt crashed down, illuminating all of the Mausoleum of Books, and

also making her figure seem abnormally lofty and tall in the light.

He did not know what to say.

Besides 'thank you'.

The Tianhai Divine Empress responded with 'you're welcome', as if what she had done was a trivial task she had casually undertaken.

But why did she do it?

"We saved you, not because you are Our son, nor because of those three squirrels, but because We did not like your appearance."

"Then why did my lady want to save me?"

"We are Our will, you are Our son, so you are the existence of Our will."

"I don't understand."

The Tianhai Divine Empress did not give an explicit explanation. Everything she did had never required an explanation, even if the target was him.

"We once heard you say that your incurable illness was fate."

Chen Changsheng fell silent. He truly had said these words, to Xu Yourong, to the Black Dragon, to himself; he had said them many times.

"Even if this is truly your fate, We will not permit you to die, so you will not be able to die."

The Tianhai Divine Empress declared.

At Mount Han, Xu Yourong had said that she would not permit him to die.

Under New North Bridge, the little Black Dragon had also said that she would not permit him to die.

But the feeling given off when the Divine Empress said these words was naturally vastly different.

Because when she said it, she could do it.

Even if her opponent was called fate.

"We believe in this thing called fate, but We have never respected it."

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed up at the starry sky and expressionlessly continued, "Since it is about defying the heavens

and changing fate, fate naturally cannot be respected, only used."

Chen Changsheng recalled the first words written in Wang Zhice's notebook.

They were both truly extraordinary people. Although their stances towards fate were somewhat different, they were, in essence, the same.

Now, the wind had ceased and the rain rested, the clouds gradually dispersing to reveal the true appearance of the countless stars, yet it was still a mystery what the fate that hid behind them looked like.

The Divine Empress gazed into the starry sky as she spoke, "The Heavenly Dao wants you to die, then We want you to live. The Heavenly Dao wants you to not die, then We want you to die, and then We will fight a battle with it to see which one of us is stronger."

She then drew back her gaze to look upon the world outside the Mausoleum of Books. "As for these people, in the end, they are nothing more than capering buffoons, that's all."

With her voice, a gust of wind curled around the Mausoleum of Books and lifted up a corner of her sleeve.

Her body was still at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, but Chen Changsheng felt like she was already more than a thousand li

away.

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Tens of thousands of li away in Xining Village, the night was dark and still, the small stream murmuring on.

The fish were quietly sleeping in their crevices while petals drifted from upstream, circling that pair of bare white feet and never leaving.

The monk gazed down at the petals and fish in the stream, seemingly in deep thought.

Footsteps were heard near the stream, very calm and relaxed, yet they seemed to contain countless thunderstorms.

The fish at the bottom of the stream scattered in fright, attempting to swim even deeper into their crevices. Yet they were unable to find a path and so constantly threw themselves at the edges of the sharp rocks, their collisions producing blood.

The fish blood bloomed in the stream, staining the petals a dark red. Those petals left his bare feet and collected together in the little eddies on the surface of the stream.

The monk contemplated all this for a few moments, then raised his head to gaze at the other bank of the stream, his expression solemn.

The Tianhai Divine Empress, her hands held behind her back, stood by the stream and expressionlessly looked back.

To her soul, a journey of tens of thousands of li was only a thought away.

The monk raised his left foot from the stream and bent it under his body. His left thumb touched the big toe of his left foot, seeming to touch and not touch it, forming the image of a lotus.

In his right hand was a string of dark brown prayer beads, slowly moving all on their own. As the prayer beads moved, they seemed to hold a fragment of the true meaning of time.

He gazed at the Tianhai Divine Empress, then his lips slightly opened and he began to chant scriptures.

The scriptures he was chanting were rather unique. They were not the normally seen Daoist scriptures, but scriptures with a rather cryptic style and somewhat odd tone, their rise and fall seeming to have a sort of cadence.

It was a Buddhist verse.

The Buddhist faith had long since come to an end on the

continent, but the Tianhai Divine Empress understood it to some extent. Her black hair moved despite the lack of wind as she seemed to ponder something.

With the chanting of this Buddhist verse, the petals in the eddies of the stream drew closer to each other, gradually combining into lotus flowers.

An extremely translucent Sacred Light gradually spilled out from the overlapping petals.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood by the stream, yet she seemed to be standing high up in the night sky.

What had come to Xining Village was not her body, but a projection of her soul in the air. With a thought, it could become incomparably tall.

An oppressive pressure difficult to describe began to emit from her body, and her eyes became abnormally bright, like real stars.

Those lotuses in the stream gradually began to leave the eddies, scattering in all directions. Some drifted towards her, but even more drifted towards the other bank.

The monk's expression grew even more solemn. The prayer beads in his hand began to move even more slowly, like mountains moving within his palm.

The stream became absolutely still, everything ceasing to flow. The trees by the stream also seemed to want to cease movement, but they were suddenly blown about by a violent gust.

The Divine Empress said to the monk, "Since you dared to return, you shouldn't think about leaving."

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Every family was still asleep, but the Daoist had always been awake.

He gazed in the direction of the Mausoleum of Books, a solemn expression on his face, then he turned and left.

In the small drizzle, he turned and walked into the darkness, heading towards some unknown place.

Right after, his figure appeared by the Bridge of Helplessness atop the Luo River.

He took from his sleeve an extremely exquisite and small hourglass and placed it on the railing.

The passage of time was silent and very easily prone to being neglected, resulting in all manner of measurement tools.

The hourglass was without question one of the most primitive tools to measure time, but it was precisely its primitive nature that made it reliable.

The Daoist calmly gazed at the hourglass, knowing that after twenty-seven breaths, the other side would be able to confirm his true position.

The fine sand flowed from the upper half of the hourglass to the lower half, and when it was almost exhausted, the Daoist vanished once more.

Just when he vanished, a cold Qi appeared on the Bridge of Helplessness. The Luo River responded, waves rising from its surface and then quickly calming down, a few fragments of ice even appearing in the river.

A black shadow appeared where the Daoist had just been standing: the Tianhai Divine Empress's ruyi.

This ruyi seemed to hold a extremely formidable soul. It had already ceased to be an unliving object and was currently searching for the whereabouts of the Daoist.

In the cold cave under New North Bridge, a girl dressed in black was currently sleeping. For some reason, the cinnabar wound between her eyebrows seemed exceptionally bright.

At this time, the Daoist had come to a stall selling lamb meat buns in the northwest part of the capital.

He glanced at the hourglass in his hands. This time, he could pause for twenty-three breaths.

The time the Divine Empress needed to confirm his true position was growing shorter and shorter. This also meant that the places where his true positions were located were getting closer and closer.

If she was able to confirm the Daoist's position, she was certain to use all her strength to kill him.

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The Tianhai Divine Empress stood at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, calmly gazing in the direction of the Li Palace.

This night had persisted for a very long time, and it would not be long until dawn.

Yet the Li Palace had maintained its silence the entire time. The old man living within, that old man which she was required to treat with caution, had never once made his voice heard.

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Zhu Luo, Guan Xingke, Bie Yanghong, and Wuqiong Bi, these powerful figures who brought storms in their wake, had all heard the Divine Empress's voice.

Those fifteen princes of the Chen clan that had borrowed the cover of the night to enter the capital and those already restless opponents of hers also heard her voice.

This voice was very indifferent, yet it was also tyrannical beyond compare.

Earlier, Daoist Ji had said that she did not dare to eat Chen Changsheng because she was timid, did not dare to gamble because she feared the existence of the Heavenly Dao.

Yet she did not even find it worthy to use the fruit that was Chen Changsheng to gamble for the direction of the Heavenly Dao, but to gamble with the Heavenly Dao over victory and defeat!

Besides a scant few experts, no one knew that the Divine Empress's soul was already tens of thousands of li away, and her most powerful magical artifact was in the streets of the capital, seeking out the tracks of her foes. They could only see her figure quietly standing on the summit of the Mausoleum of Books, her hands held behind her back, and an irrepressible fear appeared in

the depths of their hearts.

That place was the highest point in the capital, and also the highest point in the world, because she stood there, had stood there for more than two hundred years now.

The distant ground began to tremble, and the accumulated rainwater splashed about, scattering plumes of water in all directions.

Thunder rumbled from the plains, an occasional lightning bolt revealing the faintly visible figures of countless cavalry.

It was real thunder, and also the thundering of hooves.

Other than the forces from the critical strongholds in the north, such as Snowhold Pass, that required massive military forces, tens of thousands of the finest Great Zhou cavalry were being led by eleven Divine Generals into the capital!

They were the Divine Empress's most loyal subordinates in her reign over this world, and also her most powerful military force.

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Chapter 642 – The Awe-Inspiring Great Array

The tens of thousands of Great Zhou cavalry were still on the journey from the various provinces and counties to the capital, still very far from the Mausoleum of Books, but Wuqiong Bi's expression still underwent a sudden transformation. As an expert of the Divine Domain and member of the Eight Storms, her strength had reached an extremely profound level, so she could easily see the terrifying army on the distant plains, and also the Red Falcons and Red Geese flying through the rain clouds like lightning bolts.

"It seems that this was originally all part of Tianhai's plan. We have to leave." She turned towards her husband, her face pale.

The horsetail whisk soaked from the rain drooped lifelessly from the crook of her elbow, just like her morale.

Tonight, the two sides still had not formally begun to fight and it was impossible to ascertain the situation, but the Tianhai Divine Empress's composure and confidence had already drained Wuqiong Bi of all her confidence.

She found it impossible to forget that time in the capital when the Divine Empress had launched a distant attack at her from atop the Dew Platform. Deep within her heart, she was utterly lacking in the courage to straightforwardly confront her foe.

Courage was something that might require ten-odd years or

longer of humiliation and restless nights to accumulate, but to lose it often required only a second.

Gazing at that formidable figure at the summit of the Mausoleum of Books, those princes from the provinces also began to change the look on their faces. Some were like Wuqiong Bi, taken with the impulse to retreat.

The situation truly was not clear yet, but one fact was clear: tonight's trap which had originally been planned out by Daoist Ji had now become the Divine Empress's trap.

Since the Tianhai Divine Empress already knew of everything, just who could defeat her?

Yet, at this juncture, even if they wanted to go, it was already too late to leave.

As the cry of an eagle resounded through the capital, various places in the capital suddenly responded.

Boom! In the Capital Garden of Peace, the moist ground subsided and a large cave appeared, sand and stone falling from it and water gushing out.

With the gushing of water, an obsidian statue of a sage appeared.

This statue was covered all over in mud. As it was gradually washed clean by the spring water, its true appearance was

revealed, and it also began to emit a mighty strength.

In the center of the southern part of Red House Street, a crack about three feet long appeared. This crack was unfathomably deep, yet the air that rose from this crack was not cold, but broiling hot. It was like some bronze stove that burned throughout the year was at the bottom of this crack. The rain water on the street poured into the crack and was instantly converted into steam.

In a few seconds, this famous street once renowned for its peace and quiet became a mist-ridden fairyland, so beautiful that it did not seem part of this mundane world. However, the blazing Qi within the mist made clear the danger within.

In the third courtyard in the northern part of White Paper District, there was a clack, and then the beams of all the buildings within seemed to suffer the corrosion of one thousand years, gnawed at by insects and eroded by storms, visibly rotting away and collapsing into dust, leaving only the foundation. This was an ancient and shallow set of paths paved with bricks.

The only well within the courtyard also collapsed. The well water rushed up past the ruined walls of the well, pouring into the shallow paths making up the foundations of the building, thus making it a canal.

An extremely chilly and stern Qi arose from the canal into the night sky.

In North Li of Achieving Merit was a mound like a small

mountain. Under several centuries of care, many pines and grass had been planted upon it. It was a very serene and beautiful sight, and on normal days, the denizens of the capital would choose this place to take a stroll. They had long since forgotten that several hundred years ago, this place was a grand mausoleum.

With a clap, a thunderbolt descended from the heavens and struck the mound.

The thickest green pine was struck by this thunderbolt, releasing a stream of smoke before slowly collapsing.

The collapse of the pine on the mound sent mud flying and crushed the grass beneath it.

Soon after, this mound gradually split apart, revealing the scene within.

There was no coffin, no funerary objects, only countless bones.

These bones were those palace maids who were willing to follow Emperor Taizong in death.

Yet the cold and hateful Qi within this great mausoleum made the word 'willing' seem debatable.

This cold and hateful Qi had no effect on the people living around North Li of Achieving Merit.

Because a powerful Qi arose from the underground river at the bottom of the mound. Like a cool breeze, it easily washed away this resentment, cleaned those bones.

This Qi soared upwards, straight into the night sky. It released a faint golden luster, shining in awe-inspiring divinity!

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In various places in the capital, similar sorts of phenomena occurred: a stone sculpture as foundation, a crack in the ground attracting flames, a spring flowing in reverse as a soup, or the majestic appearance of an imperial Qi.

Countless powerful Qis soared into the sky, some piercing through the leaden clouds straight into the night sky while others dazzled with a brilliance that outshone the stars. Gradually, they formed into a majestic and spectacular great array.

This array was impossible to see, but cultivators could clearly feel it. They instantly felt as insignificant as dust and also boundlessly reverent.

The reversed spring water that had poured into the foundation in the White Paper District had magically transformed into the famed Golden Broth of the Orthodoxy, yet it was only an extremely small

and unremarkable part of this great array.

The imperial Qi that had arisen from North Li of Achieving Merit and broken out of the tomb, cleaning the bones and ascending above the nine heavens, suddenly fell into the Imperial Palace.

The Lingyan Pavilion that had been tightly sealed for several hundred years and was dark as the night began to exude ray after ray of milky white light.

At the same time, an incomparably tyrannical, dignified, and upright Qi appeared in the perceptions of everyone.

This was the head of the Tier of Legendary Weapons that had not appeared for many years: the Frost God Spear!

When he sensed the Qi of the Frost God Spear and the change within the Lingyan Pavilion, Bie Yanghong's expression finally turned grave. The little red flower tied to his pinkie finger suddenly stopped swaying, hovering in the wind.

A river wound around the Mausoleum of Books. Suddenly, the water in the river completely vanished. It had not dried up, but seemed more like it had all been sucked away by the earth.

Seventy-odd objects that seemed like Heavenly Tome Monoliths appeared on the riverbed, a stone forest. The surface of these monoliths exuded a solemn Qi.

The rain clouds that had originally been dispersing in all directions sensed the call of the great array within the capital and gradually began to return. Although they did not completely block out the starlight, they cause the many stars to greatly dim.

The awe-inspiring aura of the array was like countless sharp swords, able to sever even the laws of the world. The strength contained within was enough to execute experts of the Divine Domain!

Wuqiong Bi's face was already very pale, the tyrannical feeling on her face already replaced by fear.

Guan Xingke remained silent. His bamboo hat obscured his plain and unremarkable face, yet it could not hide away his true feelings at this moment.

"This is the Imperial Design?"

Zhu Luo's expression fiercely changed. He turned to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books and asked incredulously, "You are not of the Imperial clan, so how?"

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Chapter 643 – The Princes Of The Chen Clan

What was the Imperial clan? One could be called emperor by ascending to the throne, and from this perspective, the Tianhai Divine Empress being able to awaken the Imperial Design was not at all difficult to comprehend.

But Zhu Luo had associated with the Chen Imperial clan for several centuries and knew many secrets. He knew that moving the Imperial Design required the possession of true imperial blood.

The Divine Empress had ruled for more than two hundred years, but she had only ascended to the throne twenty years ago. There was simply not enough time for the Imperial Design to admit that her blood was imperial blood.

She stood at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, looking down upon the world, looking at the great array within the capital. Her beautiful face was apathetic to the extreme, no emotions visible upon it.

Yes, she was not surnamed Chen. The true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix flowed within her body, but it was not imperial blood, and she also did not have enough time to have the Imperial Design descend, but this did not mean that she was without means.

Daoist Ji was also well aware that she would have a way, so he did not pose a question as Zhu Luo did.

In fact, in the next moment, many people, Zhu Luo included, also

thought of this point.

The great array of the Imperial Design was created many years ago, its history incredibly long, at least longer than that of the Chen Imperial clan.

The capital was presently the capital of the Great Zhou, but before the Great Zhou, this place was already the capital.

Before the Chen Imperial clan, there was yet another Imperial clan of extremely pure lineage, one that had even persisted until the present.

Zhu Luo gazed in the direction of the Imperial Palace and sternly rebuked, "Liang Wangsun, you dare engage in such disgraceful actions!"

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There were three high points in the capital.

The Mausoleum of Books and the Dew Platform were two, and the other location was the Lingyan Pavilion.

The Lingyan Pavilion was in the depths of the Imperial Palace and was a high tower.

The most important alteration the Great Zhou Imperial clan had made to the Imperial Design was the construction of the Lingyan Pavilion, and this was also where the pivot of the array was located.

Liang Wangsun sat in the very center of the Lingyan Pavilion.

Tonight, his hand did not grasp the Vajra Pestle, but a torch.

This torch was not made of gold or jade, but was glittering and translucent. At its tip blazed a white flame.

This was a divine artifact of the demons: the White Sun Flame.

Liang Wangsun's eyes were tightly closed, his face pale. The hand gripping the torch was constantly bleeding blood.

This blood flowed into the White Sun Flame, and, instead of dripping to floor, was sucked within.

The light released by the White Sun Flame was not dyed bloody from this. It remained sacred and pure, seeming to contain infinite energy.

This light was so fierce that even the exterior of the always gloomy Lingyan Pavilion was brightly lit tonight.

As for within, the Lingyan Pavilion was illuminated as brightly as day, very similar to how the Divine Kingdom was often imagined.

The portraits on its wall were illuminated very clearly, the founding ministers of the Great Zhou quietly gazing at Liang Wangsun.

If they were to know that this young prince was a descendant of the Liang Imperial clan that they had worked arduously to overthrow, they might have felt rueful.

Who were these legends within the portraits willing to confer their blessings upon?

In the past several centuries, the Lingyan Pavilion remained silent in the depths of the Imperial Palace, melding with the darkness and never letting anyone easily set eyes upon it.

Tonight, it was growing brighter and brighter.

In the past several centuries, the stone steps and plaza before the Lingyan Pavilion had been absolutely deserted.

Tonight, these places were crowded with people.

The Imperial Guards vigilantly kept watch in all directions.

Xue Xingchuan sat upon his Red Cloud Qilin, indifferently gazing

forward.

Straight ahead in the pitch-black darkness was the main gate of the Imperial City.

Tonight, the gate of the Imperial City was open, as if it was preparing to welcome guests.

At the moment, the Frost God Spear was in the Imperial Palace, releasing its incomparably tyrannical Qi.

He was here.

Then, who would dare come in?

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On this rainy night of early autumn, those who opposed the Tianhai Divine Empress's reign arrived in the capital from all over the continent, attempting to overthrow her in one fell swoop.

But there were also many people loyal to the Divine Empress.

Besides important generals of the Great Zhou Army like Xue Xingchuan, there were also people concealed in the darkness.

Perhaps it was as the Tang Second Master had said: although the Elder of Heavenly Secrets was truly unable to keep resisting the wearing away of time after the battle at Mount Han and was on the verge of death, the Divine Empress who had the friendship of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets naturally also still had the aid of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

Earlier in the night, Chen Changsheng had infiltrated the alley of the Northern Military Department and destroyed the crabapple tree courtyard, but the operations of the Department for Purging Officials were not greatly affected. The moment Zhou Tong awoke, he resisted his injuries to order his subordinates to meet up with the assassins of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and begin sneaking into the darkness, preparing for the moment when they would strike at their respective targets.

With the assistance and masking of the Imperial Design, several hundred crack assassins had already arrived outside the manors of the dukes and noble clans, and approached the carriages of those fifteen princes from the outlying provinces. Once they received the order, these assassins would act in the Divine Empress's name to cleanly wipe away ministers and descendants that dared to be disloyal to her.

The person that could send out this order was naturally the Tianhai Divine Empress herself.

All that was required from her now was a word or even a glance, and the entire capital would be bathed in blood. The process might be somewhat difficult, but it seemed that the end was already foreordained.

If speaking of causes and the fruit of these causes, the fruit that was Chen Changsheng was contrarily the cause of this matter.

Her opponents, waiting for her to suffer the backlash of the Heavenly Dao or to walk into a trap, had come one by one to the capital.

Those foes that had remained hidden for two hundred years in the darkness, those enemies that had silently endured for so many years...she had long since determined that she no longer wanted to see them again.

After tonight, she would have killed all her enemies, and then she could relax and do her own things.

This was the result she desired. Besides this, anything that happened tonight had no meaning and no effect on her.

This included the matter of how she had used the mighty energy of the world and the primordial Qi of the Mausoleum of Books to defy the heavens and change Chen Changsheng's fate. To her, it seemed that this was also a trivial matter.

The rain gently drizzled down from the night. It had no sound, and it also seemed to lack any corporeal existence. There was only an extremely faint sense of moisture.

She held her hands behind her back and gazed at the dark capital,

her expression calm.

Only Chen Changsheng behind her could faintly tell that her hands were faintly trembling.

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On a certain street in the capital, a heartrending cry of grief tore through the night.

"Imperial mother, you can pay so much for your son, this lowly one...this lowly one is also your son!"

A man fell from one of the fifteen imperial carriages that had entered the capital under the darkness. This man was dressed in clothes of dull yellow, his appearance ugly. With an extremely sincere look on his face, he incessantly kowtowed in the direction of the Mausoleum of Books, tears dripping down his face as he spoke. "Mother, please forgive, your child has been deceived...no, your baby has been tricked by others to this place!"

In these few remarks, this man had addressed the Tianhai Divine Empress one way and then another, and he changed the way he called himself three times, making the listener want nothing more than to cover up their ears.

This man was the famously mediocre and incompetent Prince of

Louyang. It could be said that this prince had no sense of honor, but there was truly no one who felt he was lying.

Ever since he was a child, he had been timid and afraid of getting in trouble. On a grand undertaking like the rebellious princes entering the capital, with his everyday temperament, he would have never dared to take part, so he truly must have been tricked here. Only after entering the capital did the Prince of Louyang finally understand what they were intending to do tonight and was so scared that his entire body was shuddering. After seeing how easily the Tianhai Divine Empress took control over the situation, he was so scared that his legs gave out. He didn't dare stay, yet he couldn't even walk. Quailing in fear, he quickly clambered out of the carriage and kneeled on the ground to beg for mercy.

Soon after, a few princes recalled the Divine Empress's dignified grandeur of the past and also walked out of their carriages to kowtow towards the Mausoleum of Books. However, most of the princes hurled abuse at the Mausoleum of Books. Before coming to the capital tonight, they had already pushed thoughts of life and death out of their minds. For a moment, phrases like 'Demon Empress' and 'Go die' filled the air.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books and gazed at those people who were nominally her sons, slightly arching her brow. In truth, she already didn't have much of an impression of the Prince of Louyang, only remembering that he was very dumb. As for those other sons, she found them extremely unpleasant. She rebuked, "Seeing you pieces of trash, I will be grief-stricken in place of Emperor Xian. To have given birth to so many sons, yet not one of them has any promise!"

She was scolding these princes of the Chen clan, so all the princes of the Chen clan heard her voice, whether they were in the capital or on the road from Luoyang to the capital.

On that official road surrounded by nothing but wasteland, the Prince of Xiang used his hands to support the fat around his waist and gasped as he walked in front of the carriage. Looking in the direction of the capital, he yelled, "Mother, I can do it, I have promise. Your son treated Mother with great filial piety. I even picked the flowers of the Hundred Herb Garden to present to Mother in a vase, had fruits washed clean and sent to Mother's bed, playing along with whatever Mother wanted to play..."

The more he spoke, the more he felt wronged. Holding his belly, he resentfully cried out, "Up to now, Chen Changsheng hasn't even called you Mother, and Mother is still willing to show such an unfilial son so much kindness. Why can't Mother treat me a little better? I am also Mother's son; just let me become Crown Prince."

These shameless words made the prince's followers on the road feel very embarrassed, confused as to how to react.

In the distant summit of the Mausoleum of Books, the Tianhai Divine Empress heard these words and the fiendish aura about her appearance actually somewhat dissipated. "You are the one with the most promise."

As he heard the voice coming of the night sky, the Prince of Xiang's face was filled with joy and he found it difficult to restrain himself.

The Divine Empress continued, "But you've grown too fat, too ugly, like a pig."

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This first sincere conversation between the Tianhai Divine Empress and the Prince of Xiang in twenty years made many of the princes that had already arrived in the capital laugh, and then go absolutely silent.

The Prince of Louyang completely ignored these things. Accompanied by his attendants, they traveled in the darkness through a side alley that he had known as a child. He did not move according to what they had all agreed upon beforehand and go to the observatory, but instead headed towards a different place.

"Your Highness, where are we going?"

"The Orange Garden," the Prince of Louyang replied, his face pale.

He was one of the last Chen princes to be exiled from the capital, so he had an opportunity to get to know Mo Yu, and their relationship wasn't bad.

At this dangerous moment, the first thing he thought of was that he had to find her and request that she protect his life.

He had never once thought that Mo Yu might not be in the capital.

At such a critical moment, as the Divine Empress's most trusted right hand, there was no reason for Grand Lady Mo to not be present.

However, she really wasn't here. The gate to the Orange Garden was shut, the little orange lantern hanging in front of it unlit.

The Prince of Louyang paled even more as he wondered what was going on.

"Your Highness, where do we go next?"

The Prince of Louyang grit his teeth, then said, "To the Imperial Palace. Grand Lady Mo should be there."

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Chapter 644 – True Words Like Blood

With the movement of the Imperial Design and the imminent return of the army, the situation underwent thousands of changes and fell once more into the Divine Empress's control.

Standing on the summit of the Mausoleum of Books, she gazed at a certain place in the capital and asked, "What did all of you come here for?"

From the moment the Qiushan clan head and its Guardian entered the capital, they had remained silent and low-key, making it very easy for others to forget their existence.

But since the Tianhai Divine Empress had spoken now, they could no longer continue to pretend that they didn't exist.

"This matter has not one bit of relationship with my Qiushan clan."

The Qiushan clan head looked at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, his attitude abnormally humble. "The Empress knows well that we came to the capital in preparation to enjoy the maples."

No one believed this explanation. It was especially clumsy, even silly.

But it did not matter, because the Divine Empress only required an explanation, a stance.

The Qiushan clan head's stance was very straightforward, and the sillier his reason, the more straightforward his stance.

The Tianhai Divine Empress was quite satisfied. Turning to two other places in the capital, she asked, "And the rest of you? Are you also here to enjoy the maples?"

A carriage was stopped outside the Gate of Past Purity. The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan stood by this carriage, her hand holding a dragonhead walking stick.

The old lady's feet were bound, yet they stood on the drenched street like two nails, not trembling in the slightest. Her voice, however, was somewhat shaky.

"This old body has not come to the capital in a long time, so came north to take a look. Conveniently, there were some matters that needed attending to. The Empress knows that my great-grandson's wife is about to give birth."

The Gate of Surpassing Virtue was tightly shut. The Wu clan head stood in front of it as he seriously explained in the direction of the Mausoleum of Books, "Empress, do not misunderstand, I came to visit my son-in-law."

These were similarly clumsy and silly explanations, but different from the Qiushan clan head's, because they both mentioned people.

The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan and the Wu clan head departed the capital in the darkness.

The Tianhai Divine Empress did not speak. What was she thinking about? Did she feel that the stances of these two clans were not straightforward enough, or was she thinking about the only member of the Four Great Clans that had not appeared, the Tang clan?

Regardless, none of it mattered. Even if the Four Great Clans actually made their stances clear, it was not possible for them to change the present situation.

She had not killed Chen Changsheng, let alone eaten Chen Changsheng, so no matter how unfathomable the trap that Daoist Ji had laid in the darkness over these past twenty years, none of it had any power over her.

With the Imperial Design activated, an awe-inspiring Qi enveloped the entire capital. Besides Daoist Ji, and the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan and the Wu clan head who had not dared to step into the capital, everyone else was unable to leave.

Not even the four experts of the Divine Domain in front of the Mausoleum of Books were able to.

Her Great Zhou cavalry were currently entering the capital.

In the capital, there were still many ministers and generals loyal to her.

The conclusion seemed decided. At the moment, all that was required was a single order.

Just then, a voice arose from the capital.

This voice was very soft as if speaking to itself, but then it gradually rose in volume until it became an extremely pointed question. There was also laughter in this question, dense with ridicule, yet after a while, one would gradually feel that this was ridiculing itself, this laughter containing limitless regret and reverence towards some things. Ultimately, it all returned to peace and calm.

It was such a complex voice and thoughts, but in reality, it was just a simple set of words.

"Do you think that you've truly won?"

The speaker was Daoist Ji.

He stood in front of some out-of-the-way market in the capital, his feet treading upon rather filthy water, a lamb butcher's shop stinking of blood behind him.

Butcher shops were often the first place to wake up in a city's market. With it being so late at night and dawn about to come, the

lights of the butcher shop were the first to be lit.

Kakakaka, the clear sounds of chopping meat came from the butcher's shop.

The people in the butcher's shop had no idea of the awe-inspiring aura of the Imperial Design rising up nearby, nor were they were aware of the man standing outside their store.

Daoist Ji gazed in the direction of the Mausoleum of Books and ruefully sighed, "I always thought that tonight, it was me planning a trap for you, but now I know that this is not the case."

At the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng gazed at the scenes in the darkness and saw his master on this screen of light. His mind was still as perplexed as before, but there was also an indescribable feeling.

Perhaps it was because the Tianhai Divine Empress stood in front of him, and she had just changed his fate for him?

"But...this is also not your trap.

"I am a person in the trap, and you are also in a trap, and this is still a trap.

"This was not a trap planned by me, nor is it a trap planned by you. This is a trap arranged for you by the Heavenly Dao.

"The Heavenly Dao's trap."

Chen Changsheng did not understand the meaning of these words.

The Tianhai Divine Empress indifferently replied, "You are just the same as you were several hundred years ago, always fond of speaking such profound and incomprehensible words, but a swindler is still nothing but a swindler. Do you want to use these words to shake Our will? There's no trap of the Heavenly Dao, it's just a little scheme planned out on your little abacus."

"Correct, this is my trap, so it should be perfect. No matter if you chose to kill him or eat him, I made the corresponding preparations, but I never imagined that you would choose to save him, because I never imagined that a callous woman like you would actually have a moment where your heart went soft, and I found it even more impossible to imagine that you had already entered the Concealed Divinity Realm."

Daoist Ji's voice and the sound of chopping from the lamb butcher's shop mixed together. However, rather than making it unclear, his voice became extremely distinct, resounding through the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

Besides this, not a single other sound could be heard in the capital.

The Li Palace was silent, the Mausoleum of Books quiet and

tranquil.

The Divine Empress had already entered the Concealed Divinity Realm?

Many people had speculations on this matter, but only tonight did they finally receive proof. This news was sure to shake the entire continent.

"You truly are very strong. Even if you ate the fruit that is Chen Changsheng, even if the divine punishment from the starry sky truly descended, none of it would be guaranteed to injure your foundation."

Daoist Ji's voice resounded through the night.

The chilly wind blew across the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, carrying the Divine Empress's black hair with it.

Just by quietly standing here, standing at the highest place in the world, she was like a demonic god, giving an aura of invincibility.

No matter if it was the nearby Chen Changsheng, Wuqiong Bi or Guan Xingke at the bottom of the Mausoleum of Books, or the monk by the stream tens of thousands of li away, they all vaguely had the same thought: even if the Heavenly Dao changed, even if fate were thrown into disorder, even if lightning fell upon her body, she could disregard it all.

"The only thing that can injure your foundation, that can make you weaker, is yourself."

Accompanied by the sounds of chopping meat from the butcher's shop, Daoist Ji's voice became tough and cruel.

"In your view, your will is even more important than the Heavenly Dao, even more powerful. If the Heavenly Dao wished to kill him, you would insist on him living. I am forced to admit your self-confidence is still just as worthy of admiration, but did you ever think, when you made this futile attempt to place your will above the Heavenly Dao, what sort of reply the Heavenly Dao would give?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress replied, "We have never regarded the opinions of another with any importance, even if it is this starry sky."

Daoist Ji's voice was very sorrowful. "So...you chose to save him."

The Divine Empress asked, "And so what if I saved him?"

"You are perfect and powerful, we originally had not a single chance of winning, but tonight, you chose to change his fate. Presumably, you paid an extremely great price for this."

Daoist Ji's voice turned cold and firm. "For example, your cultivation has already dropped and you are no longer without equal, and this...is the Heavenly Dao's answer to you."

Hearing these words, the countless people concealed in the darkness began to stir from their shock and consider this statement.

Was what Daoist Ji said true? Had the Tianhai Divine Empress, for the sake of bringing Chen Changsheng back from the edge of death's abyss, truly paid such an enormous price?

Chen Changsheng gazed at the Divine Empress's back, gazed at the two hands held behind her. His mood was somewhat strange, his expression somewhat lost.

The chilly breeze blew through the streets, carrying with it warmth and the faint scent of blood.

After this period of silence, the Divine Empress's voice rose up once more, very cold, very overbearing, and carrying a faint tinge of derision.

"What We want to do, you mortals will never understand."

She gazed at this world shrouded in the darkness and said, "Our intentions are such that not even the so-called Heavenly Dao is able to grasp them."

These were not spoken tyrannically, yet a sense of absolute confidence seemed to run through them.

She did not deny Daoist Ji's words. For the sake of reconstructing Chen Changsheng's meridians, defying the heavens and changing fate, even she who had entered the Concealed Divinity Realm had to pay a great price.

So then where did her current self-confidence come from?

"Yes, I spoke incorrectly. Empress, you would not drop your cultivation to save him for such a laughable reason as a compassionate mother pitying her son."

Daoist Ji stood in the rain and calmly said to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, "You wished to use this action to resist the blood oath you made back then when making a sacrifice to the starry sky, wanting to wipe away the shadow over your heart left by the words 'defying the heavens and changing fate'. Only this way would you have the chance to obtain true Grand Liberation."

This simple and short conversation could not be understood by everyone.

Only Zhu Luo and the other experts of the Divine Domain, or those experts on the threshold of stepping into it, could hear the true meaning of these words.

The Tianhai Divine Empress was the supreme expert of the current continent, possessing a nigh unimaginably formidable will.

Her sole weakness might be that gap in her heart, precisely that oath she swore to the starry sky for the sake of defying the heavens and changing fate.

This was not the oath itself, but the action of making the oath. Just as she said to Chen Changsheng, the her of back then had once lowered her head to the Heavenly Dao.

What she wanted to do now was to wipe away that old matter of the past, to cover up that dust on her heart.

She wanted Chen Changsheng to live.

If she could do this, she would be perfect, no longer without weakness.

In this state, even if she dropped from Concealed Divinity to Saint, she would still be invincible!

The Divine Empress replied, "You've thought too much, and also spoken too much. You only seem very uninteresting this way."

Daoist Ji replied, "Is that so? Then if I were to say that Chen Changsheng is not at all Empress's son, would this make it somewhat more interesting?"

His voice was calm and devoid of emotion. As a result, it seemed particularly cruel.

In the deepest room of the butcher's shop at the side of the street, a thick knife covered in oil heavily smacked against the cutting board as sheep were continuously butchered, blood splashing everywhere.

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Chapter 645 – Originally, You Were Nothing At All

Both the Mausoleum of Books and the streets of the capital sank into a deathly silence.

Many people were stunned, their mouths agape, and nobody could speak. They all believed that they had misheard. Perhaps the howling of the wind had suddenly increased, making it impossible to hear clearly?

The Tianhai Divine Empress's eyes were very beautiful, bright as stars, precisely like the eyes of a Phoenix.

A streak of light flashed in her eyes, a strand of her thoughts moving out.

She gazed at a certain place in the Mausoleum of Books. She did not see it clearly, but she saw everything with absolute clarity.

That feeling still existed. It had always been there, it had always been in this place.

Crack! Several lightning bolts as thick as trees struck down from the night sky, striking all around the peak of the Mausoleum of Books and revealing everything with incomparably vivid detail.

The black clouds above violently roiled, constantly twisting

against each other. It seemed as if countless dragons were engaging in pitched battle, as if the mysteries of heaven were beginning to move, and the will of the heavens was about to descend.

An extremely faint Qi seeped out of the Divine Empress's body and drifted upwards, piercing straight through the clouds and returning towards the depths of the vast sky of stars that the eyes alone would not be able to see.

She raised her head to the starry sky, her expression indifferent, not a single word emerging from her lips.

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"What does it mean?"

"Chen Changsheng is not the son of the Divine Empress and Emperor Xian?"

"Could he not be Crown Prince Zhaoming?"

With Daoist Ji's words, the entire capital sank into a state of absolute shock.

When that rumor began to spread last year, not many people believed it. However, too many things had happened later on that

forced people to believe it. The most crucial of these things were the stances of the Orthodoxy and the Divine Empress.

For his sake, the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy had gotten into conflict after conflict, the two factions ultimately deciding to carry out a decisive battle tonight. The Divine Empress had not hesitated to lower her cultivation level to help him defy the heavens and change fate so that she could break the oath she made back then and perfect her soul. But if he was not Crown Prince Zhaoming, weren't the Divine Empress's actions meaningless?

The person that was most shocked was naturally Chen Changsheng.

Drawing on a strength he hitherto had no idea he possessed, he struggled to stand. Supporting his body with his sheath, he stared at the dark capital.

He wanted to know just where his master was and also just what those words of his meant.

The Divine Empress did not turn her head, nor did she pay him any attention.

This silence hung over the world for a seemingly endless amount of time.

His face grew paler and paler, his young and honest face brimming with frustration.

Was this true?

It had been fake all along.

He suddenly understood.

Yes, everything was fake.

When the false is taken for true, the true becomes false.

His master had made up a pack of lies and deceived the entire world.

Even he and the Divine Empress had been deceived.

The Scroll of Time perhaps really could truncate time, but that didn't mean that this time would fall on his body.

The Canon of Flowing West could change a great deal, but it could not stop the great river from ultimately flowing west.

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In this very short period of time, Chen Changsheng understood many things, even all things.

Those matters had once confused him, confused Tang Thirty-Six and confused Xu Yourong, and simultaneously given all three a vague sense of concern.

Yes, if he really had been Crown Prince Zhaoming, why would his master have let him enter the capital and appear before the Divine Empress?

Two and a half years ago, on a spring day, he had left Xining Village and come to the capital.

He had failed in ending the engagement, and been similarly unable to test into any of the other Six Ivies, ultimately ending in his entering the abandoned Orthodox Academy. It had nothing to do with whether or not the Pope knew of the situation at the time or Mo Yu having that letter. It now seemed that it had been a foregone conclusion that he would enter the Orthodox Academy. Because his master was the previous Principal of the Orthodox Academy, and his being in the Orthodox Academy would make it easier to associate him with this fact.

At the very beginning, did the Pope know of this matter? He probably didn't. Archbishop Mei Lisha then? He probably did know.

The elderly archbishop had sat in his room brimming with plum blossoms in the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, blocking out the

storms for the Orthodox Academy and making a path for Chen Changsheng. He helped Chen Changsheng mature and ripen at an almost unimaginable speed. On the Divine Avenue, he had announced in Chen Changsheng's place that Chen Changsheng would take first rank of the first banner. He let Chen Changsheng stand out from the crowd and experience the limitless glory after a hard-fought victory.

All this had been for the purpose of making him more dazzling, to have the Divine Empress discover him even faster and then focus on him, to suspect him and investigate him.

Because he was Chen Changsheng, a member of the Orthodoxy's legitimate line of succession, the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, a genius of cultivation, the inheritor of the Orthodoxy, Crown Prince Zhaoming.

Of course, all that had been fake.

He was nothing at all.

He was a fruit.

He was just a fruit.

A fruit that was naturally poisoned.

From the moment he was born, fate had already planned out his life for him, to ripen and then be eaten.

This was his destiny.

When his fate eventually concluded with the passing of time and all settled down again, the true successor of the Great Zhou Dynasty would walk onto stage and receive all this.

Who was that person? Master? The Pope? Or...the true Crown Prince Zhaoming?

At this time, Chen Changsheng should have felt sorrow, but he did not.

He was already numb.

He looked in a daze at the world beneath the Mausoleum of Books.

If everything was fake, what was real?

Suddenly, he was filled with a deep yearning for that old temple in Xining Village. He thought back, pretending that he had never come to the capital, that he was still sitting next to the stream by his senior brother, reciting and memorizing...

Senior...did he know of these things?

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Finally, many people, including those fifteen princes of the Chen clan that had infiltrated the capital in the darkness, had begun to react, to realize just what had occurred.

Still shaking off their shock, they began to ponder what sort of blow this matter would inflict on the Divine Empress and what sort of effect it would have on the world. At the same time, they naturally began to think of a very important question.

Since the Divine Empress had still not reached perfection, Crown Prince Zhaoming assuredly lived. If Chen Changsheng was not him, then where was the real Crown Prince Zhaoming?

This shocking news spread countless times faster than the speed of a Red Falcon.

On the road from Luoyang to the capital, the bloated Prince of Xiang suddenly jumped off the ground and yelled a stream of abuse in the direction of the capital.

No one could clearly tell just who he was cursing at, Daoist Ji or Chen Changsheng, but his attendants were very sure that he did not devote a single word of this abuse to the Divine Empress.

He then gasped for breath and walked back into the imperial carriage, saying, "After entering the capital, we will investigate

where my pitiful younger brother is."

On the canal from Jiangnan Province to the capital, the Prince of Zhongshan gave his subordinates a similar order, but he was much more direct than the Prince of Xiang.

"If we can secretly kill him, kill him. If we can't, then assist this prince in being the first to pledge loyalty and place myself in his hands."

Many princes also had similar ideas.

The Prince of Xiang raised the curtain of the carriage window and gazed towards the capital.

The Prince of Zhongshan stood at the bow of the ship, gazing towards the capital.

They could not see the scene at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, but they felt like they could see it.

Even these two extremely ruthless princes could feel how wretched Chen Changsheng must feel at this time.

Simultaneously, they felt that Principal Shang was extremely frightening.

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The clouds had truly scattered.

Chen Changsheng searched in the darkness for the figure of his master, but his efforts were fruitless. Slowly, he lowered his head, raindrops slowly dripping down from his soaked hair.

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed up at the infinite stars in the sky, remaining silent for a very long time, then finally speaking five words.

"So that's how it is."

Then she drew back her gaze and turned to the dark capital, her sneering voice saying four more words.

"And what of it?"

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Chapter 646 – Borrowing Imperial Blood, Descending From The Night Into The Palace

"This is the will of the heavens."

Starlight fell on the rainy streets, transforming into countless silver leaves.

Daoist Ji stood amongst the innumerable silver leaves and said, "All this is the will of the heavens."

The Tianhai Divine Empress replied, "We saved him because We wanted to save him. It has nothing to do with whether he is Our son, and also has nothing to do with the will of the heavens."

"The matter has already reached this point. Empress, are you still not willing to concede? At the end, you don't even know who your true son is, yet you dare presume to vie against the Heavenly Dao? For the sake of saving some youth with which you share no friendship, cause, or blood, you ended up falling to the cycle of the Heavenly Dao and are powerless to escape. Do you not feel great sorrow over this?"

Daoist Ji continued, "The Heavenly Dao does not need to punish, only for you to act according to your will for it to attain its goal. The Heavenly Dao is indescribable. You believed that you were fighting against the Heavenly Dao, yet you didn't realize that every time you fought was part of the Heavenly Dao's plans. Do you not feel this to be very laughable?"

The Divine Empress indifferently replied, "If this is really a plan laid down by the Heavenly Dao, then you should have it come and kill me."

Daoist Ji replied, "The Heavenly Dao cannot kill people, only people can kill people. You believed that you had everything under control, but truthfully, this is not so. You cannot control the heavens above, nor can you control the human world."

As the words fell, a wind rose up from the capital.

It was a true wind, howling as if wishing to shatter eardrums.

The wind arose from the Imperial Palace.

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Even if the Divine Empress had paid an enormous price to help Chen Changsheng change his fate and was no longer as invincible as she was at her peak, the situation in the capital was still under her control, at least on the surface. The most important reason was that the Imperial Design had already been activated.

Countless awe-inspiring sword intents rose up from all over the capital, dividing and surrounding those heroes of the world that

had entered the capital.

Even those supreme experts by the Mausoleum of Books were also unable to leave.

With just a little more time, the true danger of the Imperial Design would be fully expressed. Besides an expert like Daoist Ji who might be able to safely escape, the remaining experts would probably all be killed.

If they wanted to obtain the final victory, they had to break the Imperial Design before the Great Zhou Army returned to the capital.

The pivot of the Imperial Design was within the Imperial Palace, and there in the Lingyan Pavilion was a Heavenly Slaughter Array for protection.

If experts of the Divine Domain wished to invade the Imperial Palace, they would suffer the attack of this Heavenly Slaughter Array and their souls would be extinguished.

And those experts below the Divine Domain were simply incapable of entering the Imperial Palace.

Because the person overseeing the Imperial Palace was Xue Xingchuan.

This was an array within an array that was simply impossible to

destroy.

Besides Xue Xingchuan outside, there was one other most important person: Liang Wangsun, sitting within the Lingyan Pavilion.

Liang Wangsun's blood was also imperial blood. Besides the Chen Imperial clan, only the soul in his blood could move the Imperial Design.

Earlier, it was because of this fact that Zhu Luo had guessed that he was in the Imperial Palace and issued that furious rebuke.

The inside of the Lingyan Pavilion was bright as day. Liang Wangsun sat at the very center, his eyes tightly shut, his face pale, blood flowing out of a wound on his hand into the White Sun Flame.

He had heard Zhu Luo's question.

Disgraceful action?

It was.

This capital had once been the capital of the Liang Imperial clan.

The Imperial Design was the great array that had been left behind by the Liang Imperial clan in the first place.

It was just that later on, this capital and this array had all been stolen away by the Chen clan.

Now, his offering the Liang clan's blood to the Chen clan's Imperial Design was truly a very humiliating matter, and even calling it disgraceful was not excessive.

But Liang Wangsun did not believe so, because he was well aware that his foes were the Chen clan. The object of his hatred was the Chen clan, not the woman with the surname of Tianhai.

Anything that could make things difficult for the Chen clan, he was willing to do, let alone tonight's grand undertaking which was highly likely to deny the Chen clan all hope!

As long as he could do this, what need was there to care for the trifling emotions of his elders?

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"I also have the surname Chen, and no matter what, I'm still a descendant of the Chen clan."

The Prince of Louyang had brought his several dozen subordinates away from the Little Orange Garden and stealthily

made their way through the capital, avoiding with extreme difficulty the Imperial Guards searching for them as well as two locations that the aura of the Imperial Design had suddenly exploded out of. Finally, they reached the Imperial Palace's Gate of Southern Splendor. Gazing through the darkness at the majestic and splendid sight of the Imperial Palace, he chose a very inopportune time to think of his childhood, a reflective look appearing on his face.

"Your Highness, now is not the time to feel emotional. Where are we going next?"

The Prince of Louyang was somewhat rudely awakened by his subordinate. Somewhat embarrassedly rubbing his cheeks, he said, "Just hide in the gardens. We're not going anywhere—there's no place safer than this."

Amongst these princes of the Chen clan, the Prince of Louyang was the weakest in terms of strength and personality, and his backing was also the weakest. He naturally wouldn't be able to attract any true experts. Those cultivators that dared to follow him into the capital were presumably also not heroes with virtue in their hearts. Most of them were people high on ambition who wanted to take advantage of the chaos. Upon hearing this prince's words and recalling how useless he had seemed on the road, some of the cultivators became nervous and grumbled, "Only a world in chaos can produce heroes. If Your Highness does not want to appear, what need was there to make the journey?"

The Prince of Louyang said with a bitter face, "This prince didn't dare to not come, or else my brother the Prince of Xiang would kill

me."

The attendants from the prince's estate had long since understood the personality of their prince, but it was only now that those newly recruited cultivators truly put an end to any of their ideas.

Hearing the occasional sounds of fighting or miserable howls from the street, the Prince of Louyang grew increasingly tense, his face increasing pale. He muttered to himself, "What are they fighting over... The same for Mother—if they want to be emperor, just let them have it. Those sons of yours are extremely vicious."

Just then, a man dressed in a blue gown and wearing a mottled tiger mask walked up to him and asked, "Your Highness, to go from the Gate of Southern Splendor to the Lingyan Pavilion is not far, right?"

"The Lingyan Pavilion is very high, but to walk to its base isn't that far... Hey, just what are you planning? Don't mess around—Divine General Xue is very strong, don't you know?"

The Prince of Louyang looked at the man and uneasily advised.

The man was currently wiping the blade in his hands, not even paying attention to the Prince of Louyang's words, but when the Prince of Louyang said 'don't you know?', his hands momentarily went rigid.

"Your Highness, I want to borrow something from you."

"What thing?"

"A little blood."

Saying this, the man in the tiger mask raised the blade in his hands and made a cut on the Prince of Louyang's right arm—blood instantly spilled out of the wound and the Prince of Louyang's face instantly turned deathly white. He was just about to cry out in pain when he suddenly realized that he couldn't let anyone else hear, and so hurriedly covered his mouth with his left arm.

The blue-clothed man was just prepared to knock the prince unconscious in fear that he would make a noise. He had not expected that the prince would be afraid of death to this extent and couldn't help but freeze for a few moments.

By the time the prince's attendants and the others had noticed this activity and hurried over, the man had already jumped over the wall.

One attendant's farsighted eyes looked beyond the wall and his body turned stiff.

The blue-clothed man was charging towards the Imperial Palace.

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The blue-clothed man's speed was astonishing, giving off an almost inhuman feel.

A plume of smoke appeared in the darkness before the Imperial City, illuminated under the starlight. The man was in the very front of this plume, his body rendered almost indistinct.

Seeing this sight, some generals of the Imperial Guard with extremely long histories subconsciously recalled that fastest demi-human general from that great war several hundred years ago.

The blue-clothed was naturally not Jin Yulu, but he presumably had some relationship with the demi-humans.

Tonight, the gate to the Imperial Palace was not shut. Like a flash of lightning, the blue-clothed man went straight through the Gate of Southern Splendor.

There was no one at the Gate of Southern Splendor, only an empty plaza, yet it seemed like a limitless lethality was hidden away.

The blue-clothed man was not the least bit surprised. With a roar, he cut with his blade towards the distant Lingyan Pavilion.

The blade in his hand carried the blood of the Prince of Louyang. As this blade slashed down, the Qi within the Imperial Palace naturally responded and began to transform, countless streams of golden light appearing out of the void!

Was this the Heavenly Slaughter Array?

This blue-clothed man had still not stepped into the Divine Domain, yet he was able to use the smear of imperial blood on his blade to force the Heavenly Slaughter Array to appear. His strength was terrifyingly powerful!

The countless golden streams of light condensed into lines that set layer after layer of restriction around the Lingyan Pavilion. Several of these lines seemed to, whether accidentally or by design, drift across the floor of the Imperial Palace like fallen leaves blown about by the wind.

The blue-clothed man exploded all his true essence. Dragging a blurred image behind him, he lunged to the side, yet he was unable to avoid two streams of golden light.

With several bangs, Qi was thrown into chaos. The blue-clothed man had sacrificed quite a few magical artifacts and all had been shattered, yet he was still unable to avoid the remaining might of the Heavenly Slaughter Array. Countless bloody wounds and cuts appeared on his clothes, and the mask over his face was cut apart and blown to the ground by the wind.

This was a face in which heroism and tyranny interweaved, its

surface covered in hard and sharp fur. It was obvious that he was not a normal human, but a demi-human expert in a state of wild metamorphosis.

There were not many such young demi-human experts in the world to possess such swift speed.

From some place in the Imperial City came the cry of some general.

"Xiao De!"

Yes, this blue-clothed man who charged straight into the Imperial Palace was the supreme expert of the youthful generation of demi-humans, ranked fifth on the Proclamation of Liberation, Xiao De!

This demi-human had an extremely resounding reputation, yet he could not cause a single change in the atmosphere over the scene.

Because this was the Great Zhou Imperial Palace.

With countless low buzzes, countless troops suddenly appeared in the Imperial City, a dense mass.

The crossbow bolts on the divine crossbows shone with a biting light in the darkness.

The center of the Imperial Palace was still empty, excepting Xiao De.

Even for the fifth-ranked expert of the Proclamation of Liberation, daring to charge into the Great Zhou Imperial Palace would still end in death!

Seeing the divine crossbows in the darkness and sensing the terrifying Qi of the Heavenly Slaughter Array gradually fading, Xiao De chose without hesitation to...

Release his blade.

Kneel on the ground.

Raise his hands.

Call out.

"I surrender (降)!"

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'降' was a word with many meanings.

It could mean 'surrender', and it could also mean 'descend'.

The demi-human expert Xiao De, under these countless divine crossbows of the Great Zhou Dynasty, had unhesitantly called out 'surrender'.

Thus, the person in the night sky began his descent.

Those experts of the Divine Domain that could walk with the wind were all at the Mausoleum of Books.

If the immortal birds and strange beasts of the various sects dared to appear in the skies over the capital tonight, they would undoubtedly be shot to death or pursued to death by flocks of Red Falcons.

Who was flying in the night sky?

It was an enormous red kite.

The red kite flapped about in the wind.

There was a thread under the kite, and at the other end of the thread was a person.

This person's face was covered in a white sheet of paper that also flapped about in the wind.

Three holes were poked in this white paper and it seemed rather horrifying.

Second on the Proclamation of Liberation, Painted Armor Xiao Zhang!

He jumped down from the sky!

He avoided the golden threads of light Xiao De had just forced out and dropped like stone, smashing towards the Lingyan Pavilion!

Chapter 647 – That In This World That Is Most Impervious To Poison

Within the Lingyan Pavilion, Liang Wangsun sensed the arrival of Xiao Zhang.

As experts at the top of the Proclamation of Liberation, they were both far too familiar with each other.

He knew just how crazy and terrifying Xiao Zhang was, and he could even sense that tonight, Xiao Zhang's spear strike was even more powerful than the one he had sent at Su Li in Xunyang City.

But he did not raise his head, as he was rather tired, but also because he knew that Xiao Zhang would not be able to land within the Lingyan Pavilion.

The darkness in front of the Lingyan Pavilion suddenly began to blaze. In an extremely brief amount of time, it transformed into a blazing cloud of fire.

With a rip, a tear appeared in the deep red cloud of fire.

A spear jabbed out from this tear.

This spear's exterior was very ordinary. It was pitch-black and free of any carvings, yet it gave a most terrifying aura.

Just like the hand of some devil stretching out from the abyss.

The white paper covering the descending Xiao Zhang's face was suddenly covered in a layer of metal gray and the two eyes in their holes suddenly seemed to blaze, even turn somewhat insane.

The blazing darkness was torn into pieces, the blazing red cloud dispersed into countless strands as his metal spear fiercely stabbed towards the other spear.

Boom!

A howl of pain burst from Xiao Zhang's lips, countless tears appearing in the white paper on his face. His body was sent flying like a stone in the darkness outside the Lingyan Pavilion, retreating backwards at high speeds like a stream of light until he finally crashed against the walls of the Imperial City.

Many cracks appeared on the thick walls of the Imperial City, just like the white paper on his face, and countless bits of gravel came tumbling down from the cracks in the wall.

The blazing darkness gradually calmed back down. There were no more flames, only a red light, the Red Cloud Qilin.

Xue Xingchuan sat upon the Red Cloud Qilin, gazing at the fallen Xiao Zhang at the base of the wall with an indifferent expression.

The gravel falling from the cracks in the wall fell on Xiao Zhang's

body.

He used his spear to stand himself up. The gravel on his shoulder descended once more, together with the stream of blood from his mouth.

He used his somewhat trembling left arm to wipe the blood off his face. He gazed at the Lingyan Pavilion several hundred zhang away with a rather complex expression, somewhat reverential, somewhat fearful, and extremely excited.

It was no wonder that he was the second-ranked Divine General on the continent. Xue Xingchuan's strength was far too formidable, so formidable that even he was somewhat unable to endure it.

But the emotions in his eyes were not completely because of Xue Xingchuan. The majority of it came from the seemingly unremarkable spear in Xue Xingchuan's hand.

"Frost God Spear!"

Xiao Zhang stared at the spear in Xue Xingchuan and sharply cried out.

His gaze burned with incomparable fervor, his voice shaking like boiling tea.

The Frost God Spear!

Emperor Taizong's divine weapon!

Ranked first on the Tier of Legendary Weapons!

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Xue Xingchuan's strength was truly too powerful, even more powerful than the rumors, so powerful as to be absurd.

The pivot of the Imperial Design lay in the Imperial Palace. The Divine Empress had Xue Xingchuan guard the Imperial Palace precisely because he had absolute confidence.

Tonight, all the experts of the Divine Domain had been drawn to the Mausoleum of Books by the Divine Empress.

Even if there were experts of the Divine Domain who used the darkness to sneak in, they would find it impossible to avoid the Imperial Palace's Heavenly Slaughter Array.

As for experts below the Divine Domain, none of them were Xue Xingchuan's match.

Xiao Zhang's miserable loss in a single blow was proof.

Let alone the fact that the Frost God Spear was now in his hands. He now even had the ability to fight with an expert of the Divine Domain.

Only if Wang Po himself came and was also holding Zhou Dufu's Halving Blade would there be even the slightest hope of victory.

But everyone knew that there was no chance of Wang Po appearing tonight. Although he had no love for the Divine Empress's cruel reign, he had an insoluble grudge of a thousand years with the Chen Imperial clan.

No one could defeat Xue Xingchuan with Frost God Spear in hand, and so no one could break the Imperial Design, and so the situation in the capital would remain from beginning to end under the Divine Empress's control.

From any angle, this was a situation that was impossible to resolve.

Xue Xingchuan dismounted from the Red Cloud Qilin and patted it on the back, indicating that it should leave.

A streak of fire illuminated the darkness as the Red Cloud Qilin left the battlefield to some place deep within the palace, to await its next summoning.

Xue Xingchuan stood at the bottom of the long steps of the

Lingyan Pavilion, calmly gazing at Xiao Zhang and Xiao De, these two experts of the Proclamation of Liberation, and slowly raising the Frost God Spear in his hand.

The several thousand soldiers in the Imperial City raised their divine crossbows, preparing to release a cruel rain of arrows.

Suddenly, Xue Xingchuan's forehead suddenly creased, and his complexion subtly changed.

"My apologies." Xiao Zhang's voice penetrated through his blood-spattered white paper, seeming particularly cold and terrifying. "I am not your match, but tonight is not a competition of strength!"

Upon hearing these words, Xue Xingchuan's complexion changed once more, his eyes turning cold like an iceberg.

Xiao De placed one knee on the floor and suddenly slapped the ground. The stones on the ground were instantly shattered and sent flying into the air.

Simultaneously, he used his final magical artifact. A frenzied Qi accompanied those flying stones in all directions, raising up plumes of dust and instantly obscuring the scene.

An extremely fierce roar of madness rose out of the dust.

It was Xiao Zhang's voice.

The darkness and the dust together shrouded the Imperial City and footsteps like war drums sounded out.

Xiao Zhang began to charge, a fierce horse, ramming through the dust and stone fragments, tearing through the darkness. In the wink of an eye, he arrived in front of the Lingyan Pavilion.

With a boom, a clap of spring thunder seemed to explode from the front of his spear as it stabbed at Xue Xingchuan.

Xue Xingchuan snorted, and his true essence exploded and surged. With the shake of his wrist, the Frost God Spear came down to meet it.

There was a crisp bong like a thousand-year-old bell had been rung.

The Frost God Spear shone amidst the dust and darkness, the faint sun high in the autumn sky, exuding an aura of absolute bleakness and somberness.

At the same time, this spear seemed to contain an indescribably lofty aura and a high unimaginable imperial might and pressure.

Even Xiao Zhang could not avoid this spear and was directly knocked to the ground.

Several ear-grating screeches resounded from the long steps of the Lingyan Pavilion.

Xiao Zhang's two hands were placed on the head and tail of his spear, raised up horizontally towards the sky. The middle of the spear was already bent!

His two arms were already bent!

His knees bent with them!

He kneeled on the ground!

The flagstones shattered!

His knees shattered!

His wrist bones shattered!

Blood shot out of every part of Xiao Zhang's body, his lips included, momentarily forming a sphere of blood in the darkness.

What was even more horrifying was that even after suffering such severe injuries, enduring the might of the Frost God Spear, Xiao Zhang still did not completely fall.

For what reason did he hold on? He was clearly no match for Xue

Xingchuan, so why had he charged towards him?

Just then, Xue Xingchuan's complexion changed once more.

This was already the third time.

His expression underwent an even larger change than the last two times. His two brows shot up as if he was particularly angry and his complexion turned extremely ugly as if rather bewildered. His eyes were somewhat disappointed as if not daring to believe. Then...a stream of blood shot out from between his lips!

This blood was green.

Just like how his eyes were also turning a faint green.

Just like how his eyebrows and hair caressed by the breeze were also turning green.

Xue Xingchuan had been poisoned, severely poisoned.

He could clearly sense tens of thousands of little knives incessantly scraping, stabbing, and cutting into his meridians.

His true essence was leaving with unimaginable speed from his body and venting out into the world.

What sort of poison was this? To be able to injure him?

In this very short time, he concluded that the poison in his body was assuredly that legendary poison, the tasteless and colorless, formless and substanceless Peacock Plume.

But was that not a method belonging to the Demon Princess? Could it be that those people opposing the Divine Empress had actually colluded with the demons?

But just when had he been poisoned?

Since Principal Shang was Daoist Ji, this divine doctor was assuredly a great poison master. On this aspect, he had always acted with great caution.

In this half-year, no matter if it was eating or cultivating, even bathing or changing clothes, he had never let anyone else do it, always acted with great prudence.

Suddenly, he remembered something and understood how he had been poisoned. He turned towards a palace hall in the darkness, his complexion changing once more, becoming somewhat painful, somewhat sad, somewhat desolate.

It turned out that the doctor's medicine had been a lethal poison.

The human heart that was the most impervious to poison.

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In that quiet and dark palace hall, the Zhou Tong that had been severely injured earlier in the night lay on his bed like a corpse, his eyes open wide as he stared at the roof.

His eyes were like those of a dead fish, no luster within them. They gave a rather nauseating feeling, just like the stench rising from his mouth as he muttered to himself.

"That which is most impervious to poison is the human heart, and the human heart is human nature, and human nature is to live—what's wrong with that?"

Zhou Tong stared at the roof, his face a deathly gray. No one would be able to hear his feeble voice say to himself, "None of us are a match for him, not even the Empress. Our family is just the two of us, we can't all die. He promised me that I would live, so...Brother...it's best if you're the one that dies."

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Blood dyed Xue Xingchuan's armor green, shining with a faint

luster.

The dark Imperial Palace suddenly became abnormally quiet. Countless gazes fell upon the long steps in front of the Lingyan Pavilion.

Xiao Zhang knew that the major task had been completed. He could no longer hold and painfully drew back his already-broken arms. His right leg, the only unharmed limb on his body, stepped on the fractured ground, and he left Xue Xingchuan.

Xue Xingchuan was constantly coughing, each cough bringing up a jade-green stream of blood.

The gentle breeze softly blew through the darkness and brushed against his brows and hair.

He no longer had the strength to hold the Frost God Spear, somewhat tiredly placing it down.

With a thump, the ground slightly shook as the Frost God Spear fell to the ground.

Xue Xingchuan did not fall. His hand tightened and he slowly lowered his head, then closed his eyes.

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The air above the Imperial City was filled with countless cries of alarm, brimming with grief and shock.

Suddenly, two gouts of flame shot up from two watchtowers to the southwest while the Eagle Pavilion to the east suddenly collapsed. And for some reason, many treacherous crossbow bolts suddenly shot out from the darkness to stab into the bodies of their colleagues. Miserable cries constantly rang out and the entire place fell into turmoil. The Imperial Guards were thrown into disorder, no longer able to pay attention to the heavily injured Xiao Zhang and Xiao De.

When the dust settled, Xiao Zhang and Xiao De's figures had already vanished, but the chaos continued. The sounds of shouting and fighting could be heard throughout the darkness.

A tall and thin figure appeared at the west of the Imperial City, outside the Gate of Primal Respect.

The lights of the gates illuminated his appearance, handsome and cold. It was the Tang Second Master.

A deputy general of the Imperial Guard walked out of the gates and whispered to him, "Uncle."

Chapter 648 – The Entire World Rebels Against Tianhai

The Tang Second Master walked into the Imperial City.

This was his first time coming to the Imperial Palace, but he was very familiar with it. No matter if it was the Heavenly Slaughter Array or any other array, none of them could slow his steps in the slightest.

Before long, his blue clothes had vanished in the darkness. When they next appeared, he had already arrived before the Lingyan Pavilion.

This long set of stone steps before him extended all the way to the night sky, seeming as if one could use them to ascend to the heavens.

To many people, the Lingyan Pavilion and this long set of steps made up the most magnificent and most beautiful building in the Imperial Palace.

But to the Tang Second Master, these stone steps and that lone tower high above were the most hideous buildings of the Imperial Palace.

In his view, the Lingyan Pavilion and this long stairway were a complete mismatch with the Imperial Palace's style. They were too new and too obvious.

"Truly the artistic sense of the newly rich."

He lightly mocked, then began walking up the steps.

Arriving before the Lingyan Pavilion, he did not display any caution or prudence. He pushed open the door and entered, seeming excessively calm and easygoing.

Liang Wangsun sat in the center of the Lingyan Pavilion, quietly gazing at the tightly shut window, seeming to be thinking about something.

His blood was still flowing, spreading through the streets of the capital by means of the light emitted from the White Sun Flame.

"Emperor Taizong's modifications to the Imperial Design were not completely thorough—there are still some problems he wasn't able to address. If you continue to persist, your blood will very quickly be drained clean."

The Tang Second Master walked into the Lingyan Pavilion and glanced around him at the portraits on the walls. Striking his folding fan against his palm, he shook his head.

Liang Wangsun raised his head to look at him and asked, "Who are you?"

The Tang Second Master calmly replied, "My surname is Tang, and my seniority is second."

Liang Wangsun's expression grew slightly more serious. "So you are the Tang Second Master."

The Tang Second Master gave one of his noiseless laughs, seeming to be quite happy that a famous man like Liang Wangsun also knew of him.

Then his smile instantly faded as he expressionlessly said, "Since Sir knows who I am, then you should clearly know that you are not my match."

Liang Wangsun calmly gazed back, replying, "Other people do not know of how terrifying the Tang Second Master is, but how could I not know? But right now, my soul is one with the Imperial Design, so how can you move me?"

The Tang Second Master's gaze fell upon his body.

A stream of light, a golden Qi, was currently flickering around Liang Wangsun's body.

He sat in the Lingyan Pavilion, yet he was already one with the capital's Imperial Design.

Any sort of attack was an attack against the Imperial Design and would receive the full might of its backlash.

But if one did not attack Liang Wangsun, how could he be separated from the Imperial Design?

The Tang Second Master once more gave a noiseless laugh. His appearance should have been rather amusing, but in the Lingyan Pavilion that was lit as brightly as day, it seemed particularly frightening.

Without even glancing at Liang Wangsun, he walked towards the east pillar of the four pillars in the Lingyan Pavilion. He took an item from his sleeve and inserted it in the pillar.

Liang Wangsun's expression suddenly shifted when he saw this. He wanted to do something, yet he was unable to stand.

An extremely ancient Qi seeped out from the Tang Second Master's palm. Through the item, the Qi poured into the pillar and continued deeper. Passing through the seemingly endless stone steps, it entered some cave below the Imperial Palace. There, through previously unknown secret channels and canals, it spread throughout the capital.

A breeze stirred within the Lingyan Pavilion and a soft drone could be heard, then the light instantly dimmed!

The demon's divine artifact, the White Sun Flame, was extinguished!

Liang Wangsun's blood flowing from his hand to the White Sun Flame was no longer absorbed, but continued its journey to drip to the ground.

A groan of incredible pain burst from his lips!

Just like that, his soul was ripped away from the Imperial Design. Although he did not suffer the complete backlash from the array, being so forcefully torn away had dealt him severe internal injuries!

Right after that groan of pain, blood trickled down from the corner of his lips.

Liang Wangsun's complexion became abnormally pale, the hand holding the White Sun Flame faintly trembling, his eyes brimming with shock.

He looked at the Tang Second Master and asked incredulously, "How do you know of the array pivot and the divine techniques!"

The Tang Second Master slowly drew his palm back from the pillar. He took a handkerchief from his sleeve and carefully wiped splinters from his palm.

There was a magical artifact made from bronze on the pillar, the vast majority of it embedded within. Only the top layer could be seen, and it looked just like an eye.

An extremely ancient eye.

"Just as I said to a junior not long before, one has to learn how to revere, and what is most worth revering about our Tang clan is our history." He looked at Liang Wangsun and continued, "Whether it was the Chen clan or your Liang clan, all of you believed this great array of the capital to be yours, but you all forgot, this great array...was built by our Tang clan."

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In the autumn forest in the Capital Garden of Peace, the statue of a past sage made from obsidian slowly sank back into the ground, yellowed grass quickly growing back on the muddy ground.

In the center of the southern part of Red House Street, the crack in the ground slowly closed. The scorching Qi rising from its depths was gradually cut off. The wind gradually blew more harshly, constantly howling as if wailing in unwillingness.

In the north part of White Paper District, the rotted buildings of that courtyard could not be reconstructed, but the clear water in the canals flowed back into the shattered well.

In the North Li of Achieving Merit on that mound, green pines grew back up from the muddy earth, the bones and corpses buried once more. Lightning constantly flashed down and the golden

luster that soared into the sky was once more stained by resentment, no longer as dignified and divine as it once was. All returned to silence, from beginning to end a grand tomb which no one was aware of!

The light emitted outwards by the Lingyan Pavilion instantly vanished and returned to darkness, just as it had been for the last one thousand years.

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The awe-inspiring array energy shrouding the capital gradually dispersed into the world.

The unrest in the darkness that had been suppressed for so long gradually began to surface.

The Prince of Louyang anxiously remained hiding in the mansion right outside the Imperial Palace. The other Chen princes, however, headed towards their own residences or the residences belonging to students or old friends of their parents.

The assorted ministries of the Great Zhou Imperial Court all became abnormally silent, no one knowing what sort of change would occur next.

The Ivy Academies were also in a state of absolute silence. The

cavalry of both the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy had all withdrawn, heading towards places where the situation was even more tense.

No one knew that the Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Zhuang Zhihuan, was at the residence of the Minister of Rites.

The Minister of Rites who had only displayed his true attitude during the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness had a very lofty reputation in the Imperial Court, so although he had endured an extremely difficult period in the last year, the Divine Empress had not treated him as she had treated other ministers, expelling them from the court and granting them death.

Perhaps for this reason, his stance was not as fierce as others had imagined.

"If people don't have to die, it's best to not have them die. If a little less people can die, then a little less people should die."

The Minister of Rites extracted a thick stack of papers from his sleeve and placed it in front of Zhuang Zhihuan. "I've been standing guard in the court for more than two hundred years, guarding until the clouds finally parted. What I was waiting for was not for a dynasty to gain power and for blood to flow. I deeply esteem the Empress, and I somewhat pity those ministers. Not everyone is Zhou Tong or Cheng Jun, not all of them are evil."

After Zhuang Huanyu's suicide, the Principal Zhuang who had lost his only son had grown even more taciturn. Tonight was no

exception.

He took the stack of paper, glanced at the name written upon them, then left the mansion. He made no promises to the Minister of Rites.

Gazing at his back, the Minister of Rites sighed. He knew that after tonight, whether the Divine Empress won or the other side won, an extremely tragic situation would ensue.

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The situation in the capital tonight was abnormally tense, but it was also particularly strange.

Of the several factions that could sufficiently influence tonight's situation, some had not yet made their voices heard.

The Li Palace's silence might indicate that the Pope was still hesitating, just like the Green Leaf was still swaying.

But what of the Tianhai clan who had operated for so many years in the capital, who had great strength hidden in both the court and the army...why had they continued to maintain their silence?

The darkness around the Tianhai clan's mansion and estate

concealed at least ten thousand cavalry, and many cultivators would occasionally come in a rush of wind.

These cavalry and cultivators were the strength under the control of the Tianhai clan. The problem was that this strength should have appeared in the Imperial Palace, appeared in the various ducal estates, appeared in the offices of the Imperial Court. They should not have remained here, and even after such a long time, there was no sign that they planned to mobilize.

This apparent silence was truthfully only external. Within the mansion and estate of the Tianhai clan, many things had already occurred.

These things were very bloody, very cruel, but the two sides of the conflict were clansmen, family members, relatives, father and son...

The blood on the floor of the courtyard was particularly dazzling under the light of the lanterns.

Tianhai Shengxue narrowed his eyes. His stomach still churned with disgust and he felt rather dizzy.

In this period of time, message after message had come. A few of the younger descendants of the Tianhai clan that still insisted on not complying with orders and sending out the troops were cruelly suppressed by the strength of the clan head.

A few of his cousins had probably already been subdued, even killed.

His own younger brother had just now, right before his own eyes, had one of his arms chopped off by his father.

"Why?"

He raised his head to look at his father, his voice shaking. "Why do you have to do things this way?"

"What 'why'?"

In the spacious hall, the chair seemed particularly lonely. Tianhai Chenwu sat upon this chair and also seemed very lonely, but this did not mean the look on his face would change in the slightest.

He looked at his own son and expressionlessly asked, "Just what exactly do you wish to know?"

"I want to know a lot of things!"

Tianhai Shengxue angrily cried out, "Just what do you plan on doing!"

After experiencing the earlier part of the night's turmoil and the gory suppression, this hall was now devoid of others. Only father

and son were present, a loneliness that was somewhat horrifying.

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Chapter 649 – The Grief and Song of Relatives and Others

"If you want to know why we have not appeared at the Mausoleum of Books...that is because that level of battle is already beyond our ability to participate in, let alone yours." Tianhai Chenwu stood up from his chair and slowly walked to the door, silent for a few moments before speaking, "As for this conflict in the capital, since I've already made my decision, I will no longer change it."

"Even if Father can so easily make your decision, how can we so easily accept it?"

Tianhai Shengxue's face was as pale as snow.

"I am the patriarch of the Tianhai clan. My decision is the will of the Tianhai clan."

"Father should not forget that the Tianhai clan is the Tianhai clan because the Empress carries the surname of Tianhai!"

"But you must also not forgot that phrase that has circulated throughout the continent for so long: Tianhai is Tianhai, and the Tianhai clan is the Tianhai clan!"

Tianhai Chenwu gazed at his son like he was an idiot and harshly yelled, "For what reason should I have the entire Tianhai clan accompany her to the grave!"

Tianhai Shengxue gave a somewhat despondent laugh, saying, "Could it be that Father believes that when the Empress is no longer here, our Tianhai clan will be able to continue to exist?"

"The truly intelligent person will never reject the slightest chance of survival."

Tianhai Chenwu gazed in the direction of the Mausoleum of Books, the corners of his eyes slightly twitching. He took in a deep breath, forcefully calming his mind, then said in a slightly hoarse voice, "His Holiness and Principal Shang swore an oath to the starry sky; they have no space to back off. Afterwards, if the Imperial Court wishes to stabilize as quickly as possible, they will require our existence."

Tianhai Shengxue said in anguish, "Father, you usually aren't such a naive person. Why have you become so confused?"

"Naive? Confused?" Tianhai Chenwu spontaneously laughed, a tinge of pain and hatred flashing through his eyes, his voice growing even more hoarse. He harshly cried out, "If the final moment had not come, do you think I would have made this sort of decision? Just a moment ago, the Empress saved Chen Changsheng—do you not understand what this means?"

Tianhai Shengxue was slightly startled, then an expression of struggle appeared on his face. He wanted to argue a few words, yet he had no idea where to begin.

"This means that the Empress has already decided to pass down the throne to Chen Changsheng!"

"But...news just came from the Mausoleum of Books that Chen Changsheng is not Crown Prince Zhaoming."

"And how is that important? Regardless of Crown Prince Zhaoming's identity, all that means is that the Empress has never thought about passing the throne to me."

Tianhai Chenwu's voice became even colder. "Since this is the case, why should I let the Tianhai clan split their skulls and spill their blood for her?"

Tianhai Shengxue still could not accept this, saying, "Even if this is the case, could that mean that Father will be able to ascend to the imperial throne afterwards? No! The only person able to ascend to the throne will still be that Crown Prince Zhaoming that no one knows the whereabouts of! Principal Shang has planned for so many years, and he simply will not allow anything else to occur. The Prince of Xiang cannot, the Prince of Zhongshan cannot, and Father, you have no hope either, so what's the difference?"

"The difference is that if the Empress wins, for the sake of her son, she will assuredly do her utmost in the coming years to weaken us, and then just kill us. But if the Empress loses, if her son wishes to rule this country under the watch of the seventeen princes, he will require the Tianhai clan to act as arms."

Tianhai Chenwu's voice was incomparably cold. "After all, we are

his mother's family, he is my cousin. We are all one family, no?"

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The rain over the capital had already stopped, but a torrential rain was still falling over the distant plains. The occasional lightning bolt in the night sky would illuminate the figures of the Red Falcons shuttling back and forth with startling clarity.

Suddenly, a lightning bolt struck down and a rain of crossbow bolts rose up, a torrential rain flying in reverse, to shoot down a Red Falcon flying south.

Soon after, thunder boomed from the rain clouds, rumbling along while the thundering hooves instead gradually came to a stop. What replaced it was the sound of crossbow bolts whizzing through the air and the clashing of metal.

Similar scenes occurred in many places, taking place in the several great armies preparing to return to the capital as reinforcements. The armies of the Great Zhou fell into turmoil in the rain and then quickly grew quiet, making not a single sound.

Just like that, tens of thousands of cavalry halted their forward march, stopping in the pouring rain in a bizarre silence. No one knew just what had happened.

At the very front of the cavalry of the Great Zhou Mount Song Army returning to the capital from their fort in the Wusong Mountains, a carriage was quietly parked.

With the support of her Guardian, the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan descended from the carriage with great difficulty. Standing in the torrential rain, she gazed at the mass of cavalry before her.

"Where is your general?"

The several thousand cavalry of the Mount Song Army parted like a tide. The seventh-ranked Divine General of the Great Zhou, Tian Song, rode out from the back on a black dragonhorse.

Seeing the old lady standing by the carriage, Divine General Tian Song slightly lowered his head, allowing the rain to wash his armor in silence for a very long time.

Ultimately, he still dismounted from his horse and said awkwardly to the old lady, "This child is wearing a full suit of armor, so cannot bow to Mother."

"At this time, what are you still doing caring about these overly elaborate rituals?"

The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan was not angered by his attitude, only nagged like an old lady, "Your daughter is about to give birth. It's best to quickly return home with me to come and see."

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The Black Mountain Camp was the force of the Great Zhou Army most skilled in defense. They were famous for their arrays and were particularly skilled in the use of magical artifacts. Normally, they guarded the capital, and they were deeply trusted by the Divine Empress.

Earlier, because the Demon Lord left Xuelao City and invaded Mount Han, the situation in the north was abnormally tense, so the Black Mountain Camp was transferred to the front by the army, setting up defenses on the frontline of Huayang County. However, they were still not far from the capital. This was because of the several armies returning to the capital tonight, although the cavalry of the Black Mountain Camp were few, they had been the quickest to set off towards the capital.

Until they had been forcefully stopped, by the rain or some other reason, at the heights of Red Pine Valley, thirty li north of the capital.

The pouring rain fell upon the hastily erected tent, banging away, not like war drums, but like a sack full of wine falling against the ground.

The tent was filled with the scent of strong wine, but this did not mean that at this tense moment, there was still someone in the mood to drink and feast. Rather, it was become some bodyguards

had suffered significant injuries and were currently being treated.

The commander of the Black Mountain Camp was Divine General Wu Shuang. This Divine General's background was unusual, his bearing elegant and graceful. He commanded his troops strictly, but not harshly, made a clear distinction between punishment and reward, and did not go overboard with either. He was deeply revered and loved by the troops under his command. If a person meant him harm, let alone injury, those bodyguards at his side would even be willing to lose their heads to keep him safe.

But tonight, the situation was different. Those bodyguards could put their life on the line against their opponents.

Divine General Wu Shuang's face was as white as paper, his complexion as frigid as ice. It was clear that he had suffered significant injuries.

His gaze flitted past those Guardians in the tent who he had grown up with, and ultimately rested on his father. His emotions suddenly became agitated and he wanted to stand, yet under the restriction of magical artifacts, he could not move.

He angrily yelled, "The Empress has always treated me with the greatest generosity. Father, by acting this way, are you not making me commit a great injustice!"

The Wu clan head looked at his own son and replied, "The Empress truly does trust you, but has she ever given your clan even an iota of trust?"

Wu Shuang's expression did not change as he said in a deep voice, "The Empress has not treated me unkindly. I cannot turn my back on her."

The Wu clan head's expression also did not change. He indifferently answered, "So your father will not allow you to have any heart of betrayal. Right now, you have the heart, but not the power."

Wu Shuang thought of how his father had led these several Guardians in an ambush and taken him prisoner, and his complexion became even nastier.

The Wu clan head calmly said, "Just accept it...the Empress saving Chen Changsheng at the Mausoleum of Books has directly led to the Tianhai clan's betrayal...could she not even think of this point? But why did she insist on doing this? Because she is Chen Changsheng's mother. Then, could I possibly harm you?"

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The troops returning from the Han Province Army had experienced fierce combat. For the moment, they had paused beyond the rain clouds by the Chenggong Mountains.

Tian Chui, sixth-ranked Divine General of the Great Zhou, stood

on the corpse-filled battlefield, his two hands gripping his spear.

Ten-odd streams of blood seeped out of the chinks in his armor. His eyes were open extremely wide, brimming with fury.

He stared at those gradually approaching subordinates that he had once fought alongside on the battlefield, those who were once his schoolmates, and sternly yelled, "Even if you lot can kill me, how can you possibly convince the rest? Of the seven armies returning to the capital, even if you kill all of us generals, how can you make the officers and soldiers obey your orders!"

The several dozen soldiers encircling him suddenly parted, and Chen Guansong, Principal of Star Seizer Academy, slowly walked down from the mountain slope.

"Teacher...when did you leave the capital?"

Divine General Tian Chui stared at Chen Guansong and his expression suddenly changed. "Even Teacher...has also rebelled?"

Chen Guansong gazed at him and said, "The Great Zhou Dynasty was never surnamed Tianhai, it was surnamed Chen. The word 'rebel'...as your teacher, I cannot accept it."

This extremely senior member of the Great Zhou Military, who was so low-key that he had almost been forgotten by everyone, gazed at the terrible plight this disciple of his which he had most admired two hundred years ago had ended up in. His face revealed

an expression of suffering as he said, "In resisting the demons in the north, you have achieved enormous merit for the sake of humanity. That the Great Zhou has been able to barely keep a balance of power in these past few years is all because of you. As long as you are willing to surrender, His Holiness the Pope, Principal Shang, and the princes would all be elated. You would be able to choose any army in the north to command."

An expression of slight disappointment appeared on Divine General Tian Chui's face. After a moment, all of it dissipated, a tinge of ruthlessness flashing across his face as he asked, "Just why did you do this?"

He did not respond to the advice of his beloved teacher. He only wished to know the reason.

When Chen Guansong left the frontline, he returned to the capital and took the reins of Star Seizer Academy, helping the Great Zhou Imperial Court raise countless outstanding generals. He was assuredly someone deeply trusted by the Divine Empress. Moreover, he understood his teacher and knew that it was impossible for Chen Guansong to endure for two hundred years for the sake of tonight's undertaking. So just what matter had made him stand opposite the Divine Empress?

"I said just before, you are the reason the Great Zhou has been barely able to keep a balance of power in the north with the demons...Xue Xingchuan never leaves the capital, Xu Shiji is incompetent. Crucially, just what is the Divine Empress thinking? Correct, in the end, I became disappointed in the Empress. This is the reason."

Chen Guansong gazed at Tian Chui and said, "I hope that this reason can convince you."

Divine General Tian Chui fell silent for a very long time. Then, he began to laugh, revealing his full mouth of white teeth. His laugh was very miserable, yet also filled with ridicule and scorn.

"And just what do you people know?"

The rain clouds in the sky finally drifted over the Chenggong Mountains.

Torrents of rain fiercely descended, yet they could not wash away the blood on Divine General Tian Chui's armor.

He stared at Chen Guansong, stared at those soldiers who were once his schoolmates and compatriots, his face one of absolute contempt as he declared, "Come."

Chapter 650 – Even If My Choice is Wrong, My Gaze Decides the Arrangement

The scene of the Chenggong Mountains, the story within the Black Mountain Camp, occurred tonight in many places. The Western Sea Army returning to the capital was stopped at the Guiyuan Mountains, the one entering its camp Archbishop An Lin of the Li Palace. Crucially, the Tianhai clan succeeded in their plan of preventing two armies from entering the capital.

Tonight was the most crucial night for all of the human world that opposed the Tianhai Divine Empress. All of her enemies and opponents, even her own relatives, stood up and displayed an unimaginable strength.

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"You don't even know who your own son is. What right do you have to rule the Great Zhou?

"You can't even control the human world; why prattle on about resisting the Heavenly Dao?

"You can control nothing, not even your own fate.

"Tianhai, just abdicate."

Daoist Ji had left the street.

The puddles on the street still seemed to contain his footprints.

The sounds of butchering meat had stopped. The sounds of fighting all over the capital had most likely finally warned the butchers that some momentous event was occurring in the world.

In this very brief amount of time, the entire situation had undergone a world-shaking transformation.

The Imperial Design had once more sunk into the earth, its awe-inspiring array energy had vanished, and various places in the capital had fallen into turmoil. The several armies speedily returning to the capital had all, for various reasons, had their march halted. Some armies were still attempting to continue forward in the torrential rain, but it was very obvious that it was already impossible for them to promptly arrive.

The Mausoleum of Books was very silent, abnormally silent, so silent that it felt rather strange.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood at the edge of the Divine Path, her hands held behind her. She looked down at the capital, a mocking smile suddenly appearing on her sublimely beautiful face.

This world was once hers.

It was not known whether this mocking smile of hers was aimed at the world or at herself.

Then, she turned towards that ever-silent Li Palace in the northwest part of the capital.

At this moment, that voice anticipated by countless people for such a long time finally spoke.

The Pope's voice was very calm, but everyone could hear his regret.

"We were all wrong. Only Mei Lisha was correct."

The Divine Empress slightly arched her brow, seemingly rather interested in hearing the next part.

The Pope thought of his old friend and thought of those past conversations, and his tone became very sorrowful. "He always believed that you would ultimately choose to save Changsheng, no matter who Changsheng was."

"And as long as you chose to save him, you would immediately fall into this plight."

Daoist Ji's voice came from the plains to the north of the capital.

His body appeared in the autumn grass. Ten-odd li away at the

city gate, the jade ruyi containing a limitless spiritual energy had just appeared.

"I always believed that these were choices offered by me to you, but in reality, these were the choices offered to you from the Heavenly Dao."

Daoist Ji stood in the grass and calmly spoke, his voice resounding in the night sky in front of the Mausoleum of Books.

"Kill him, eat him, or save him. These are all choices, but no matter what you choose, they're all wrong. Only not answering this question, not making a choice, was correct. Amongst all these incorrect choices, you even made the stupidest choice, thus turning your plight into a desperate one."

The Tianhai Divine Empress calmly replied, "Plights and desperation? Who in the world has the right to say these two words to me?"

Daoist Ji replied, "Of course, only you can say it yourself. You can rule this world without caring for your marriage with Emperor Xian, not caring for your ability to rule, only caring about your power. As long as you are powerful enough, no one would dare harbor disloyal thoughts. Even if they did have disloyal thoughts, they would not dare take disloyal actions. But your choosing him, weakening yourself, also gave the people of the world a chance to change their disloyal thoughts into disloyal actions, gave them courage. Let alone the fact that this choice was tantamount to discarding the Tianhai clan, making your most loyal strength your opponents as well."

The Tianhai Divine Empress's gaze fell on the capital, seeing those scenes of fighting and the quiet estate of the Tianhai clan.

She then gazed beyond the capital, seeing the mountain valleys in the pouring rain, the blood in the valleys.

Daoist Ji's voice rose once more in front of the Mausoleum of Books. "Everyone has already left you."

The Divine Empress expressionlessly replied, "That is because they are fools who can only see what is before them."

Daoist Ji's voice suddenly grew harsh.

"Is this a lack of foresight? No! Think of Chen Guansong, think of those Divine Generals. Their betrayal of you ultimately originates from their disappointment! You've reigned for two hundred years, and the demons have just happened to be at their weakest in these two hundred years, yet in your short-sightedness, only knowing how to preserve the strength of your loyal armies, you never once attacked the demons. Not only did you not advance a single inch, in the past twenty years, you even ceded ground and sued for peace! You managed the country well, although with extreme cruelty, and you also had an extremely good grasp over the confluence of the north and south—although that is primarily the Holy Maiden's achievement—but on this aspect, you humiliate all of humanity!"

"So it was all for the sake of a righteous cause that all of you have

betrayed Us?"

Another mocking smile appeared on the Tianhai Divine Empress's splendidly beautiful face.

This time, it was very obvious that she was mocking the world.

"Then did you ever think that in tonight's battle of the Mausoleum of Books, countless human experts will die, fallen and scattered as to be unbearable. The great armies on the road will have no room to advance or retreat, the hearts of the soldiers will be unsteady. If the Demon Army invades, who will stop them? If they slaughter the Central Plains, slaughtering the common people, who will bear this responsibility? A righteous cause? Can any of you bear it?"

She glanced at the Li Palace and smirked.

"I tempted the Demon Lord to Mount Han to first have him fight with the Elder of Heavenly Secrets. The Elder of Heavenly Secrets was heavily wounded, thus becoming unable to help you tonight. Right after, I invited the White Emperor north of Mount Han to ambush the Demon Lord. The Demon Lord became heavily injured and could only return to Xuelao City to nurse his injuries. Moreover, I have also made plans in Xuelao City. After tonight, they will bear fruit, but Empress, you might not be able to see them."

Daoist Ji's voice was calm and easygoing. "I used twenty years to arrange for tonight's trap; I naturally will not leave a single gap.

Empress, there is no need for you to be concerned."

Hearing this, Chen Changsheng finally confirmed that his meeting with the Demon Lord at Mount Han was truly a trap planned out by his master.

His body grew colder, but it wasn't because of the earlier drizzle or the wind blowing across the peak.

Every time he recalled the sight of that middle-aged scholar standing amongst the persimmon trees by the stream, he would always feel very cold.

His master had used his greatest secret to tempt the Demon Lord to Mount Han, but he had been completely unaware.

At the time, he truly had almost died.

"That's right, Master raised me for ten-odd years, and you have to use it more than once to make it profitable."

He mumbled to himself.

"Your gaze has always been only on the north?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed north to the autumn plains, a mocking smile dancing about her lips. "In the end, your arrangement is still too small."

No person could hear her words.

Whether it was the 'gaze' or the 'arrangement'.

Daoist Ji had schemed this trap in the capital and had made another plan in Xuelao City. No matter how one saw it, this could be called an extremely large arrangement, yet to her, it could only obtain such a disdainful evaluation.

"All of these are excuses. All of you just don't like a woman standing high above you. So it is for you, and so it is for Chen Guansong."

The Tianhai Divine Empress's gaze drifted even farther away, her voice following.

Only Chen Changsheng could hear her voice.

Because at this time, she could no longer be bothered to say anything to this world.

After all, she had discovered that all her so-called enemies and opponents were, just as expected, a pile of trash.

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Chapter 651 – Her Gaze Is Far Away, at the Other Side

Far in the distance, by Xining Village's old temple, the stream was silent.

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at the monk across the stream and said, "You should know very clearly just who I have always been wary of."

The prayer beads in the monk's palm ceased their movements. His eyes still closed, the monk indifferently replied, "They have never gone to the other side, so they naturally cannot contemplate what you have contemplated."

She replied, "I also have never been."

At this time, she was still at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, but her gaze was here, tens of thousands of li away.

No matter how far, as long as they were connected through this world with her Qi, her soul could personally come.

This was the her standing by the stream.

The monk pondered her response and replied, "That is reasonable."

The Tianhai Divine Empress asked, "Is this not the situation you most desired to see?"

The monk replied, "I never imagined to see anything when making this plan."

The Divine Empress calmly gazed at him and asked, "Are you Crown Prince Jiancheng's son? Grandson?"

The monk's face revealed a nostalgic expression. After a moment of silence, he softly answered, "Crown Prince Jiancheng is my father."

The Divine Empress's brows rose as she asked, "We do not understand—why did you exiled imperials join hands with him? After all, he is Emperor Taizong's black dog."

The monk slowly said, "Ultimately, even the greatest resentment cannot surpass time or the desire to return home. We wish to return."

The Tianhai Divine Empress asked, "But did you not think that you could be the vanguard of the other race?"

After some silence, the monk shook his head and replied, "We descendants of imperials are not the other race. This is our homeland; no person has the right to obstruct our return."

The Divine Empress replied, "And you are so sure that the other

race on that continent will not have other ideas?"

The monk fell silent, ceasing to speak.

The limpid waters of the stream had long since been frozen by their two powerful souls.

The lotuses formed from blood drifted west and then east in the stream. The trees by the stream would occasionally move in the wind or become still despite it.

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With a bout of autumn rain, a sudden chill, the grass that yesterday was still very green now turned completely yellow.

Daoist Ji stood in the grass that didn't even reach up to his knees. Sensing the distance between him and that black jade ruyi, he once more turned to the Mausoleum of Books and said, "Just abdicate. Like Su Li, leave this world."

The Tianhai Divine Empress drew back her gaze from the stream in the far-off Xining Village and replied, "Those sons of mine wish to be Emperor, Chen Guansong wants to leave his name on the annals of history, Yin has been trapped by the words 'the benefit of mankind', the White Emperor wanted to fight a battle with the Demon Lord, but what of you? From beginning to end, I never

understood just what you wanted to accomplish by doing so many things."

Daoist Ji expressionlessly replied. "This is His Majesty Emperor Taizong's dying wish, and you also once promised me and my junior brother that you would return the throne to the Chen clan."

The Divine Empress replied, "I only have one son and he suffered the wrath of the heavens. In my womb, his sun wheel was destroyed."

Saying this, she glanced at Chen Changsheng, then glanced at some place in the Mausoleum of Books.

"No matter which one is my son, perhaps pure and kind, or simple, or a fool, or a cripple, if he ascends to the imperial throne, who will reign over this world?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed in the direction of the autumn plains and mocked, "At that time, who will the true emperor be? Those good-for-nothings and scoundrels, or you?"

Daoist Ji was silent, not answering this question.

The wind blew across the wilderness, shaking the yellowed grass. They seemed like rice paddies, but they gave off no sweet aroma, only the stench of decay after being rotted away in the rain.

"Saying so many uninteresting words, seeing so many

uninteresting people and affairs, in the end, all of you still have to kill Us."

With these words, the Tianhai Divine Empress finally moved.

She took one step forward, and the hands that had always been clasped behind her slowly spread apart.

Not a single drop of rain fell from the night sky, but when she opened her hands, several drops of rain, carried along by some wind from parts unknown, fell in her palm.

She lowered her head to gaze at those crystalline drops of water like pearls in her palm, then she raised her head once more to the world that had already vexed her to the extreme.

"So, who dares to kill Us?"

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Tonight's situation had already undergone world-shaking transformations.

With the silencing of the Imperial Design, the sounds of killing rose in all parts of the capital, along with occasional sparks and columns of fire. In the distant plains, some armies were still like

stone statues guarding a tomb while others were in the midst of turmoil. This world had already left the Divine Empress's control. Even those ministers most loyal to her and her own household had chosen to abandon her.

Without question, the situation she faced had already become nasty to the extreme.

Yet she did not shrink back in the slightest. Looking at the supreme experts around the Mausoleum of Books, all her enemies in the world, she asked this question.

Who dares to kill Us?

These five words were tyrannical to the extreme, arrogant to the extreme. They resounded through the quiet Mausoleum of Books and the streets of the capital, echoing on and on without end, yet from beginning to end, no one dared respond.

After quite some time, a sound finally rose up.

This was the sound of a flagstone being rolled over, a sound very much like the clacking of teeth, and also like the sound of bones bearing a massive weight.

Kakakaka.

Zhu Luo stood up from his wheelchair, his gaze traveling up the white Divine Path until ultimately resting on the peak of the

Mausoleum of Books.

"Let me try."

When he said those three words, there was no sense of passion, only flatness, as mild as water.

Perhaps because he clearly knew what his end would be, or perhaps because after he opened Su Li's letter in the Myriad Willows Garden, he had always been waiting for the end.

Zhu Luo, one of the Storms of the Eight Directions, Sect Master of the Emotion-Severing Sect, an important figure of Tianliang County. Just as Su Li had said in Xunyang City, he could die, but he could not lose.

Now, he had already lost and been crippled, so what was there to pity about his death?

He had come to the capital tonight precisely so that he could die. He wished to use his death to obtain the greatest benefit for his clan and sect.

"What do you want?"

Daoist Ji's voice came from the distance. It was no longer at the autumn plain to the north of the capital but now seemed even farther.

Zhu Luo used his left hand to grip the sword at his waist as he expressionlessly declared, "I want the Wang clan to never rise again."

He did not say which Wang clan, but everyone knew of the Wang clan that he spoke of.

The Wang clan of Tianliang County had long since declined. Now, only one person remained.

Zhu Luo's demand to never have the Wang clan rise again was precisely targeted at that man and that blade.

Daoist Ji's voice did not speak for a few moments. Only after a while did he finally give a response.

It was very obvious that this demand Zhu Luo made on the verge of death was one that even Daoist Ji felt rather troublesome.

"Very well, I promise you."

At this, Zhu Luo's face finally revealed some emotion and his body was drawn up even straighter.

He walked forward, and when his slow steps fell on the shallow accumulation of water on the stone plain, they gradually began to form a distinct tempo.

He arrived at the base of the Divine Path and slowly unsheathed his sword.

A powerful Qi rose up with the unsheathing of this bright sword, spreading out and filling the world.

Chapter 652 – White Moonlight

In Xunyang City and the Myriad Willows Garden, Zhu Luo had suffered two successive blows and was no longer at his peak, but when he unsheathed his sword, he was still an expert of the Divine Domain, accompanied by a storm.

Tonight, the torrents of rain had poured down for a very long time. Even now, there was still rainwater flowing down from the mausoleum. This rainwater gathered in the shallow canals of white, gradually muddying the waters in them.

Suddenly, the turbid waters of the canal became a pure white akin to snow.

Not because they had been cleaned, but because of the reflected light.

A extremely bright and clear splendor appeared at the base of the Mausoleum of Books.

This splendor came from the sword in Zhu Luo's hand.

Next, a sphere of pure white light appeared amidst the scattered clouds and stars. Everyone knew that it was fake, but it seemed so real when they looked up at it.

Zhu Luo's sword slashed towards the Mausoleum of Books.

A streak of moonlight followed.

A streak of moonlight simultaneously appeared in the night sky.

The waters in the canal shone with incomparable brilliance, so white as to be somewhat dazzling.

The Divine Path paved with white jade also shone a pure snow-white.

A streak of sword intent and two streaks of moonlight, the opening strike and the follow-up attack, came like a tide.

This was that most powerful sword technique Zhu Luo had become enlightened to several centuries ago when he saw the moon of the demons on the snowy plains to the north.

He had relied on precisely this sword technique to behead the then-second-ranked Demon General, thus establishing from then on his transcendent reputation.

Tonight was his final night and this strike was presumably his final strike, so this was naturally his most powerful strike.

The entirety of the Mausoleum of Books was awash in moonlight. For this transcendent expert of Tianliang County to push his sword intent to such a level while so heavily injured was truly awe-inspiring.

Yet...such a powerful and masterly strike was not even able to enter the Divine Path, much less reach the summit of the Mausoleum of Books.

The instant his two streaks of moonlight rose up to follow his sword intent, another stream of light exploded from the base of the Mausoleum of Books.

This stream of light was brighter, purer, harsher than Zhu Luo's moonlight.

It was a sword glow.

This sword glow like a snowstorm enveloped the world at the base of the Divine Path in an extremely brief amount of time.

These two extremely powerful sword intents clashed.

The water in the canals boiled, spraying countless crystalline drops of water into the night sky that were promptly cut in two.

The firm plain of black stone was scored with countless extremely straight sword slashes, at least several feet deep.

The world was filled with the shrill and abnormally terrifying sounds of slicing.

Were the two streaks of moonlight able to drive away the snowstorm, or would the snowstorm ultimately obscure the moon?

Suddenly, the extremely grating sound of metal being broken was heard!

In a gale of wind and snow, the moon in the night sky was scattered and smashed, the streaks of moonlight in front of the Divine Path annihilated along with it!

Zhu Luo's figure suddenly dissipated.

In the next moment, he had returned in front of his wheelchair.

His face was extremely pale, the sword in his hands already broken.

His gray hair danced in the night wind. Occasionally, a few stalks would snap off.

He had carried a resolve to die as he slashed at the Mausoleum of Books. He had been incomparably determined, so he would naturally not choose to retreat.

He had been forced back by the snowstorm of sword intent.

The Tianhai Divine Empress had still not struck, so whose sword

intent was so powerful?

Zhu Luo's body began to faintly tremble as if the wind was about to blow him onto the ground.

Guan Xingke glanced at him.

Zhu Luo slowly shook his head. He slowly placed his broken sword back in its sheath and then slowly raised his head to look forward.

He could have performed these actions much more confidently and easily but he did not. He did everything with great gravity and slowness because he knew that this was the final time he would be able to sheath his sword.

The sword intent akin to a snowstorm gradually dispersed, revealing a vague picture of the base of the Divine Path and the pavilion there.

In the pavilion sat a man.

Zhu Luo gazed at it and ruefully sighed, "I did not expect that you were already so powerful."

With a soft rip, the front lapel of his gown was cut open, revealing a clear and deep wound out of which blood gradually seeped.

"Two years ago, Xun Mei met his death while seeking the Dao, moving me. On that night, I decided to break through. From that moment on, I was already this powerful."

A ancient voice emerged from the pavilion.

This voice had come from the suit of armor, as if dyed by the scent of time pervading the dust and rust upon the armor.

As the words fell, dust gradually rose, and then came the scraping of metal.

Then, the pavilion collapsed, dust rising up in a plume. Amidst this dust, a mountainous figure was faintly visible.

He had sat under this pavilion for six hundred years. Tonight, he finally stood up.

He was the guardian of the Mausoleum of Books.

The first ranked Divine General of the continent, Han Qing.

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Seeing the suddenly collapsed pavilion, seeing the figure amongst the dust, everyone was shocked, their expressions extremely grave.

None of these experts that had come to the Mausoleum of Books would forget the existence of this legendary figure, but they had grown used to treating him as a sculpture or symbol.

Having guarded the mausoleum for six-hundred-plus years, Han Qing, the number one Divine General of the continent, had obtained the respect of the entire world. Even the Storms of the Eight Directions would not dare look down on him.

Everyone knew that if he had not sworn an oath to guard the mausoleum, he might have stepped into the Divine Domain many years ago.

Yet only tonight did people discover that he had already broken through!

He stood before the Divine Path, his left hand holding his sheath and his right holding a sword. Although he was just one man, an entire army seemed to stand there.

"When His Majesty Taizong returned to the sea of stars, you once swore an oath that you would not enter the Divine for your entire

life."

Zhu Luo did not pay any attention to the gradually deepening wound on his abdomen. Staring at Han Qing, he asked, "Now that you have broken your oath, how can you have the face to meet His Majesty in the future?"

Besides Zhu Luo, Guan Xingke, Bie Yanghong, and other experts of the Divine Domain, no one else knew of this matter, nor did anyone understand why Emperor Taizong, on the verge of death, had made Han Qing swear this sort of oath.

Even the Qiushan clan head did not know of this secret. His face turned pensive.

Han Qing was silent, not responding to Zhu Luo's words. The shadow of his helmet obscured his face, making the expression on his face a mystery.

"The old men of the past, those old-fashioned oaths—none of it is important."

Zhu Luo sorrowfully sighed and continued, "That's right, in Xunyang City, even I broke my oath to the starry sky and attacked Wang Po, so what right do I have to demand anything from you?"

Saying this, he slowly seated himself back on his wheelchair and then slowly closed his eyes.

The blood seeping from the wound on his abdomen suddenly began to change color. It became sparkling and translucent as if mixed with the fragments of many crystals.

This crystalline blood dissolved in the night wind, transforming into countless specks of splendid light.

His body also transformed into countless specks of splendid light, just like that moon that was hanging over the snowy plains of the demons several centuries ago.

This light was gradually scattered in the wind, drifting away in all directions until nothing remained.

Only a vacant wheelchair remained.

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Zhu Luo had died.

Regardless of what evaluation the common people had of him,

especially after that rainy night in Xunyang City, he had still been a major personage of the continent.

Although he had been handed consecutive miserable defeats by the Holy Maiden of the south and Su Li, he was still a supreme expert of the Divine Domain, a grandmaster of humanity.

When he was young, he had gone several times to the snowy plains of the north and achieved enormous merit, was able to compose poems while drinking, and was an extremely confident and easygoing person, the idol of multitudes.

When all was said and done, he was the Sect Master of the Emotion-Severing Sect, the patriarch of one of Tianliang County's most prestigious clans, and a Storm of the Eight Directions.

Under normal circumstances, the death of such a major figure was certain to be a major event that shook the entire continent.

Tonight, his death seemed ordinary.

Not merely because he had died too calmly, but more because when many people saw his death, their reactions were not very exaggerated.

This was a sign that everyone had already mentally prepared themselves for the fact that these sorts of events would continue, these sorts of scenes would continue to appear.

It was inevitable that more experts of the Divine Domain would die.

They just didn't know if it would be another of the Storms of the Eight Directions or the Saint at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

Tonight was truly a terrifying night.

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Clap.

The sheath in Han Qing's hands fell to his feet, splashing water about.

The turbid waters in the canal jumped up as well then fell back down, returning to stillness, not daring to move.

Two extremely profound eyes peered out of the gloom under the helmet and looked around the Mausoleum of Books.

A voice also came out from the gloom, transmitted to all of the Mausoleum of Books.

"All who step upon the Divine Path will die."

This was the order the Tianhai Divine Empress had given him before bringing Chen Changsheng to the summit of the Mausoleum of Books.

No one dared to respond, leaving only silence.

Guan Xingke silently gazed at the empty wheelchair. At some point, his bamboo hat had been removed, revealing his ordinary and unremarkable face.

Bie Yanghong had a solemn look on his face. Wuqiong Bi stood at his side, the horsetail whisk resting in the crook of her arm still drooping down to her waist. Her hands clenched extremely tight until they were pale.

Although Zhu Luo had been heavily injured, he was still one of the Eight Storms.

And if what Han Qing said was true, that he had only stepped into the Divine Domain no more than two years ago, then logically speaking, his understanding and control of the world's laws and principles should have been far inferior to Zhu Luo's.

Yet he had only used one strike to kill Zhu Luo.

This was a fact that they found very difficult to accept, that caused their hearts to somewhat sink.

But no matter how difficult it was to accept the fact, it had already occurred. That which should be done still needed to be done.

The three Storms could already vaguely perceive that the Divine Empress's soul was already somewhere else—only her person was still standing on the Mausoleum of Books. Moreover, she had just suffered a drop in cultivation from helping Chen Changsheng defy the heavens and change fate, and had even suffered a psychological assault from learning the fact that Chen Changsheng was not Crown Prince Zhaoming. It could be said that she was at her weakest state in the past two-hundred-plus years.

This also meant that now was the time with the greatest chance for the Divine Empress to be defeated.

They could not miss out on this chance.

If they wanted to step on the Divine Path and battle with the Tianhai Divine Empress, they first had to defeat Divine General Han Qing at its base.

Moreover, others did not know, but they knew of Han Qing's greatest secret and so they yearned even more for Han Qing to die.

Wuqiong Bi's expression grew increasingly nervous, a hint of fear occasionally flashing across her eyes, ultimately replaced by madness.

She who was evaluated by the Divine Empress as being foolish and incompetent, almost an idiot, was still an expert of the Divine Domain. Her Dao heart might suffer setbacks occasionally, but they could not completely influence her mind.

"Han Qing must have been injured. This is our chance. Let's quickly ascend!" she sternly said to Bie Yanghong.

The small flower tied to his pinkie finger lightly swayed, seeming to follow its own cadence. As it bobbed in the wind, it seemed very beautiful.

Bie Yanghong was silent, not complying with his wife's words.

The rain had long since stopped. The clouds had parted and the stars glimmered. Suddenly, the vast sky of stars seemed to grow brighter.

It gave the feeling that all the stars in the sky had drawn closer to the ground.

By the wheelchair, Guan Xingke's figure was no longer there, only his bamboo hat in the rainwater.

The innumerable stars in the sky, seeming both real and fake, came to the Mausoleum of Books, sweeping towards where Han Qing stood along with that figure.

Han Qing slightly raised his head, and that face which had been obscured in the gloom of his helmet for six hundred years was finally illuminated by the starlight.

It was an incomparably elderly face.

Chapter 653 – Journeying Back and Forth Across Ten Thousand Li Requires Only a Breath

The sword rose, the sword fell, snow and wind exploded.

Han Qing's sword was like the snowy plains immersed in winter, intruding into the starlight with an incredibly harsh chill.

In a symphony of shattering, the innumerable stars were cut through and then cut to pieces.

Those stars were not real, only the condensation of starlight. Although cut apart by the snowstorm of Han Qing's sword, they did not truly crumble and fall, but became countless shards reflecting the starlight.

In the night sky in front of the Divine Path, countless trails of shooting stars appeared. At the very front of every one of those trails was an extremely tiny shard of starlight.

The canals on the stone plain were also filled with innumerable tails of starlight, making them seem very beautiful.

Those numerous and close shooting stars passed through the fierce blizzard and fell on Han Qing's body.

Papapapa, like a sudden rain, like a sandstorm beating against a

tent, countless tiny cuts were instantly made on the surface of the ancient armor.

The dust in the chinks of the armor was jolted off. The rust on its surface was gradually peeled off by the starlight shards, and a dark red color could faintly be seen.

"Useless coward!"

Seeing Guan Xingke using his starlight to enter the snowstorm and take dominance over the stage, Wuqiong Bi could no longer wait for her husband to move. After giving a rebuke brimming with resentment, she charged over.

Following behind her figure were violent waves several hundred zhang tall, the icy cold water of the ocean carrying the deathly aura of silent extinction to the base of the Divine Path.

In a battle of the Divine Domain, obtaining victory meant that no quarter could be given. With her first attack, she used her strongest technique!

Rumble! The sound of tempestuous waves thundering down arose from the Mausoleum of Books. Endless waves of blue-green smacked down at Han Qing.

There was no change on Han Qing's elderly face. He seemed just like an old tree stump that had been cut down several hundred years ago.

The look in his eyes also did not change, just like an old well that had already been dried up for several hundred years.

Facing the joint attack formed from the most powerful techniques of these two supreme techniques, he still raised his sword and straightforwardly chopped forward.

His sword came from the snowy plains of the north, frigid and bleak to the absolute.

The blizzard howled, wanting to swallow up those tiny shooting stars, to freeze those thousands of violent waves.

Would he be able to do it?

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The world in front of the Mausoleum of Books's Divine Path was divided by three masterly Qis, creating three miraculous scenes.

In the three parts of the night sky, one was filled with shooting stars, one was a blizzard, and the last was covered in mighty waves.

In the distance, there was a small red flower in the blizzard,

amongst the stars, flickering in and out of the waves, as gaily-colored as ever.

Countless snowflakes descended, freezing the waters in the canal, which were then shattered once more by the tiny shooting stars. Immediately after, deathly waters carrying an aura of silent extinction swept through.

Han Qing's armor was completely cleared of rust by the shooting stars, then washed to a shine by the endless waves.

The surface of the armor reflected the extremely complicated lights resulting from the starlight mixing with the sea water, painting the night sky above the Mausoleum of Books with a gloomy color.

With two muffled claps, the traces of a horsetail whisk were left on the shining chest plate of the armor, by its side a carving like that of a star. They were both around an inch deep, almost piercing straight through the armor.

Blood slowly began to seep out of the chinks in the armor, then was instantly frozen into bloody flowers akin to coral.

When simultaneously facing the most powerful attacks of two experts of the Divine Domain, no matter how profound Han Qing's cultivation, he was still at a disadvantage and was soon in a dangerous situation.

Yet behind the blizzard, in the depths of the stars, and high over the waves, the red flower still noiselessly swayed, clearly with no intent of participating in the battle.

Bie Yanghong suddenly raised his head up to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

A tinge of astonishment appeared in his serene and clear eyes.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books. No matter how fierce the battle below the Divine Path, her expression did not change in the slightest, not even paying it a glance.

Her gaze was in an extremely faraway place, tens of thousands of li away.

Her soul was also tens of thousands of li away.

Tens of thousands of li away, by the stream near Xining Village's old temple, the monk suddenly opened his eyes and looked to the other shore.

The breeze caressed the branches of the trees, and it also caressed the sleeves of the sublime beauty standing on the other side of the stream.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood by the stream, yet she already seemed to no longer be there.

The monk slightly frowned. He lightly waved his sleeve, throwing the string of prayer beads in his hand into the stream.

With a plop, the prayer beads fell in the stream, yet they did not sink down. Instead, they suddenly dispersed into several dozen beads, shooting off in every direction.

Those two blood lotuses constantly bobbing back and forth between the two powerful Qis were struck by these beads and began to violently move. As if dragged along by invisible reins, they slowly and arduously made their way to the other shore.

He sensed something, so he did not hesitate to cast away those magical beads he kept on his person to lock the stream's surrounding star radiance so as to have her soul remain here.

The corners of the Divine Empress's lips perked upward, revealing a faintly mocking smile as she also waved her sleeve.

A gentle breeze blew across the stream, making it impossible for those blood lotuses drifting over to continue their advance. Those Buddhist prayer beads scattered like stars across the stream began to shudder for some reason.

When the breeze grew still, she had already vanished from the stream bank.

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Out of consideration for many different aspects, the plains between the capital and Luoyang did not have many farms. The vast majority of it was open plain.

Late on this early autumn night, these plains that had just been irrigated by torrential rains were extremely muddy and difficult to traverse, even worse than the great marsh to the northeast of White Emperor City.

To Daoist Ji, this didn't mean much.

After leaving the capital, he had kept moving east. Shortly afterwards, he faintly made out the outline of a most grandiose city.

Yet he did not continue forward. Pausing on the plains, he gazed at the hourglass in his hands.

The upper half of the hourglass was nearly empty. The trickle of sand flowing down was extremely thin, seemingly about to snap at any moment.

He raised his head up to the night sky.

The night sky which was usually covered in uncountable stars

was now utterly devoid of them, leaving only an infinite darkness.

At the edge of the night sky, he could faintly make out strands of clouds moving at high speeds. Only there could one see a hint of silver light.

Those dark clouds incessantly tore at each other, wove into each other, and congregated with each other, forming a clearer and clearer picture in the darkness at their center.

It was an absolutely enormous black dragon that crossed the entire night sky like a mountain range.

The edges of this black dragon glowed with a silver light, giving off a frigid sensation.

Daoist Ji stood on the plain, gazing at the dragon formed from the night, his expression grave.

Finally, the Tianhai Divine Empress had confirmed his position.

He could even clearly sense Tianhai's soul returning from tens of thousands of li away, the Tianhai at the summit of the Mausoleum of Books also drawing back her gaze.

If her gaze ultimately fell on this place, if her soul returned to her body, if she came here, he would be forced to engage in direct battle with her.

Even if she could be said to be at her weakest state in two centuries, he still did not want to engage in direct combat with her.

Twenty years ago, he had already received enough of a lesson.

A stream of clear light flowed out from the depths of his Daoist robe.

This stream of clear light was extremely masterly and divine. It was simply impossible to describe it with the words of mortals.

His Daoist robe began to faintly tremble, the openings of his sleeves trembling the most.

With a rip, the sleeves of his Daoist robe tore open, ten-odd extremely thin threads pulled out by some invisible force.

In the night sky, the black dragon that was clearly formed from some Daoist technique was suddenly scored with ten-odd tears, clear light exuding from it.

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The soul had returned from far away.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's Phoenix eyes grew even brighter.

She drew back her distant gaze, yet she did not turn to Luoyang, but to her feet.

An extremely clear and bright Phoenix cry suddenly burst over the Mausoleum of Books, resounding in the night sky!

This Phoenix cry was so tyrannical that nothing in the world dared to make a noise!

The Tianhai Divine Empress disappeared from Chen Changsheng's eyes.

Two black lights, like mist or smoke, appeared on the white Divine Path.

The edge of the black light cut at space, giving off an extremely shrill sound.

These were the two wings of the Phoenix.

The Tianhai Divine Empress finally appeared before the world, revealing her most powerful side.

There was nothing that could be faster than her, whether it was sound, sight, or thought.

She did not go to Luoyang, but instead proceeded like a bolt of black lightning down to the stone plain at the base of the Divine Path.

Gloomy black Phoenix wings fanned out a gale, yet seemed to deepen the darkness.

From the pitch-black darkness extended a pure white, sparkling and translucent finger.

This finger calmly and inexorably pushed aside all snow and stars and water, jabbing towards the Daoist nun's forehead.

In such a sudden fashion, this finger appeared before the Daoist nun's eyes.

Wuqiong Bi's eyes surged with alarm. Her usually beautiful face was twisted with shock and fear.

She fearfully shrieked, her clothes flapping up, stirring up ripple after ripple from the ground as she swiftly backed away.

At the same time, the horsetail whisk in her hands madly danced for all its worth, scattering down wave after wave of deathly stillness.

But how could she possibly escape this finger?

This finger was very steady, very calm. There seemed to be no flames on this finger, yet it seemed to carry the world's hottest temperature, the true flames of the Phoenix.

With a hiss, those waves of deathly stillness were instantly vaporized into steam and then swiftly dispersed.

The ripples on the ground instantly evaporated and then ignited. With almost mystical speed, the heat spread to Wuqiong Bi's feet. With a boom, the bottom of her Daoist robe was set aflame!

The finger continued forward, calm and steady, yet it was also incomparably majestic, as though even if there were a thousand mountains and ten thousand rivers in front of it, one would still find it impossible to escape.

Wuqiong Bi stared at the approaching finger, her face an ashen gray of absolute despair.

There was a light clap.

A little red flower appeared in front of Wuqiong Bi's forehead.

This red flower was very soft and tender, its petals faintly shaking in the wind, very brightly-colored. There were even a few dewdrops on the petals and it was somewhat moist.

The finger touched the flower and the petals shook. The dew was visibly evaporating, yet it was clearly doing so at a much slower rate than the waves.

The true flames of the Heavenly Phoenix could melt all things.

The petals gradually grew soft, then dry, then particularly weary.

Ultimately, with a puff, the flower vanished in the breeze.

The finger also vanished, going off to some unknown place.

Wuqiong Bi turned to another place and screamed, "Quickly escape!"

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Chapter 654 – Killing in a Single Breath

Wuqiong Bi collapsed into the puddles on the ground.

Her Daoist robe had already been burned into tatters. Her face was pale, her body completely drenched. All in all, she presented an extremely miserable figure.

Yet she cared for none of this, screaming with all her might.

She knew that her husband had used the red flower to protect her life, that he must have paid a massive price.

The situation was now plain to see: the person that the Tianhai Divine Empress had originally intended to kill was not her, but... him.

Bie Yanghong heard his wife's words and he was naturally even more aware of the situation. The annihilation of the red flower had put him at his weakest moment.

But he could not leave, because the Tianhai Divine Empress had already arrived.

The black Phoenix wings appeared in the darkness like the shadow of death.

Nothing could be faster than her, not Wuqiong Bi's warnings or

Bie Yanghong's thoughts.

A pure, seemingly rather delicate fist appeared in front of Bie Yanghong.

This fist seemed to contain all the energy of the world, completely encapsulating his surroundings.

Bie Yanghong had a feeling that no matter which way he went, he would find it impossible to escape unless he could ascend to the heavens or sink into the earth.

Yet the great earth was firm, and the restrictions of the Mausoleum of Books prevented even experts of the Divine Domain from flying, so how could he avoid it?

His pinkie finger lightly flicked, and the string that had originally been tied to the red flower rose upward.

An invisible string seemed to extend down from the starry sky all the way to the Mausoleum of Books, tied to his body.

Through some incomprehensible manner, his body flew upwards.

Just when his two feet left the ground, the pure white fist arrived.

It seemed that his struggles had amounted to nothing, but they were actually quite critical, because the fist landed not on his face, but his stomach.

Right at that moment, the thin string tied around his pinkie swung in front of his stomach.

An enormous boom akin to thunder exploded in the Mausoleum of Books. Countless cracks appeared on the stone plain and all the waters in the canals boiled into the air, transforming into mist.

A clear path appeared in the mist, extending into the dark forests of the Mausoleum of Books.

A clear path also appeared in the dark forest, the ground completely covered in toppled trees.

The end of this path was the river outside the Mausoleum of Books. In the long-dry river bed, a huge hole appeared. The fake Heavenly Tome Monoliths lay in pieces within it.

Bie Yanghong lay in front of those broken monoliths, his stomach caved in, his body covered in blood.

The black Phoenix wings dispersed the darkness and the pure white fist appeared once more. It exploded towards Bie Yanghong, clearly not prepared to give him any time to catch his breath.

Wuqiong Bi screamed and madly rushed in that direction.

The snowstorm was still fighting against the shooting stars at the end of the Divine Path. A tinge of sternness appeared on Guan Xingke's ordinary face.

He had not expected that even Bie Yanghong, with his level of cultivation, was still not a match for even one fist of the Tianhai Divine Empress.

He could not allow this situation to continue. If the Tianhai Divine Empress truly could kill Bie Yanghong in a single stroke, then it would assuredly be his turn next.

The countless tiny shooting stars made a sudden turn in the night sky. With a sky full of starlight, they surged towards the river outside the Mausoleum of Books, striking right at the Divine Empress's back!

The snowstorm swept over him, instantly covering Guan Xingke's body in tiny cuts, all wounds sliced out by sword intent.

There was a faint connection amongst the stars, which was fate. Within the domain of stars, there was a path, and this was change.

In a moment, the shooting stars enveloped the riverside and struck at the Tianhai Divine Empress. They seemed dense and profuse to an indescribable extent, but they were not the true sea of stars; there were naturally cracks within them.

No person could find the crack in these shooting stars in such a short time.

Guan Xingke was very confident of this fact, so he firmly believed that the Tianhai Divine Empress had to turn to receive his full-force attack.

He had chosen to use his valiant cultivation to resist the snowstorm of Han Qing's sword and sent his sky of shooting stars towards that side precisely so that he could leave Bie Yanghong a chance to live.

From any angle, this choice was courageous and wise, yet in hindsight, it was the greatest mistake he made in this battle of the Divine Domain.

Because the Tianhai Divine Empress's goal had always...been him.

The Tianhai Divine Empress did not turn. Instead, she continued to fly into the night sky, and then vanished.

Two streams of black light suddenly made their way through innumerable shooting stars, the black Phoenix wings tearing through.

The vast sky of stars was riddled with paths. Even fate could be reversed; how could she not see through the cracks in these shooting stars?

An extremely clear and incomparably arrogant Phoenix cry rose up from the Mausoleum of Books.

A true Phoenix cleaved a path through the stars and arrived in front of Guan Xingke.

This was a Black Phoenix, utterly enormous, seemingly able to obscure half the sky.

With a grim shout, Guan Xingke could no longer care for the sword intent in the blizzard. He flipped his right palm and sent it up to meet the night sky.

With this single palm, the countless stars in the night sky grew brighter. These were all the stars he had seen in his many years at the shores of the Western Sea. They were all his companions.

It was only a pity that the two wings unfurled by the Black Phoenix obscured his eyes and also obscured those stars.

The darkness of death descended.

There was a light clap.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's palm fell on Guan Xingke's palm.

Silently.

Guan Xingke's palm was pristine, but his wrist bones were shattered.

He was an expert of the Divine Domain who had observed the stars for centuries, and whose flesh and bone had long since transformed to jade, their strength comparable to that of ordinary divine artifacts.

But now, they shattered like rotted wood.

Right after, Guan Xingke's hand shattered, then his shoulder shattered.

His crystal-like flesh, his jade-like bones, his blood glistening with fragments of stars, sprayed everywhere into the night.

Guan Xingke's body incessantly grew shorter, incessantly crumbled away.

Boom!

The palm hanging in the darkness also finally shattered.

Guan Xingke became a pile of shards on the ground.

With the howling of the night wind, these shards were scattered in all directions, all the way into the night sky, their final

destination unknown.

In the night sky, the massive Black Phoenix gradually dispersed its body.

The Tianhai Divine Empress returned to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

She stood on the edge of the Divine Path and slowly clasped her hands behind her.

She closed her eyes, then opened them to once more look upon her world.

She was very calm as if nothing had happened at all.

Thus, the entire world turned silent.

In the moment when the Tianhai Divine Empress closed her eyes and opened them again, her soul once more traveled tens of thousands of li away, returning to the stream near Xining Village's old temple.

The tree branches were still gently swaying in the breeze.

The blood lotuses in the stream drifted off in all directions, guideless.

The monk was still sitting by the stream, his bare feet still in the water.

"This is Our world. Your coming means you can no longer leave."

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at him and said, "And We can come and go however We please."

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Chapter 655 – The Li Palace Releases Light

The conversation and conflict by the stream near Xining Village's old temple still persisted.

On the other hand, the Mausoleum of Books was eerily silent. Not a single sound could be heard.

Everyone was stunned.

No person imagined that this was how this battle would proceed.

This was the Tianhai Divine Empress's first attack.

In the space of a breath, Guan Xingke had died and Bie Yanghong had been severely wounded.

There were extremely few experts of the Divine Domain in this world, and in the hearts of the populace and cultivators, they were like gods. Yes, everyone knew that a Saint like the Tianhai Divine Empress should be at least a level stronger than the Storms of the Eight Directions, but who could have possibly expected her to easily accomplish these things in such a short amount of time?

In this fight lasting only a few breaths, the Tianhai Divine Empress had fully displayed her power, her nigh unimaginable strength and Daoist techniques, her calculations and plans that were on par with the will of the heavens.

For the sake of changing Chen Changsheng's fate, her cultivation had been damaged and was no longer at its peak might, and she was still mysteriously entangled with the Heavenly Dao. Yet she was still able to stare at the expert by the stream from the Sacred Light Continent, menace Daoist Ji to the west of Luoyang, and return to the Divine Path for an instant to kill someone, and then send her soul back ten thousand li away!

West of Luoyang, Daoist Ji gazed silently up at the black dragon in the night sky.

The moment he sensed the Divine Empress's soul from far away, he believed that he would be her first target, so he had used a Daoist technique to form the clear light and set up an array to await her.

Beforehand, no one had expected that her first target was Wuqiong Bi.

Wuqiong Bi thought that she had come to kill her.

Bie Yanghong and Guan Xingke thought that she was attacking Wuqiong Bi so that she could kill Bie Yanghong.

In truth, none of these were right. From the first moment, her goal was to kill both Bie Yanghong and Guan Xingke in one stroke.

These were not just any two ordinary experts, these were two Storms of the Eight Directions that had entered the Divine Domain

many years ago!

What a self-confident way of thinking, what a tyrannical demeanor!

She dared to think this way because she could do it.

She wanted to do it, so she could do it.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the Divine Empress's back, recalling those words she had said to him at the very beginning.

"We will not permit you to die, so you will not be able to die."

Yes, she did not want Chen Changsheng to die, so Chen Changsheng would not be able to die. Then if she wanted someone to die, how could that person not die?

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood at the edge of the Divine Path, gazing at the world below her feet, her expression calm. It was like she had not done anything, or even left.

Only Chen Changsheng could see that her two hands were faintly trembling.

To destroy two Storms of the Eight Directions in a single encounter, even though she was the Tianhai Divine Empress, she still had to pay a price.

But the battles of Saints had never been reasonable. They only proceeded according to intentions and emphasized grandeur.

Now with the dark Phoenix in the sky, her grandeur was at its prime, a dazzling golden age of brilliance.

Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke had died, Bie Yanghong was seriously injured, and Wuqiong Bi had her courage frightened out of her. Even if the hidden experts of the noble clans and the Orthodoxy appeared, they would be unable to defeat Han Qing and ascend the Divine Path.

Her opponents had never been the Eight Storms in the first place, but the monk by the stream near Xining Village's old temple, the Daoist that was just about to stealthily enter Luoyang, and also...

The Tianhai Divine Empress turned to the Li Palace.

She had not forgotten where her strongest opponent was.

From the time the battle began, the Li Palace had maintained its silence. Only when Daoist Ji revealed Chen Changsheng's origins did the Pope say a few words.

Besides that occasion, it had always remained silent.

This was the place that was able to decide tonight's outcome.

The entire world awaited the Pope's choice.

Just then, a light suddenly burst out from the capital.

This light came from the Li Palace, from the Great Hall of Light.

At this sacred and pure light, the Divine Empress's Phoenix eyes slightly narrowed, sharp and cold to the extreme.

In truth, she had long known what choice the Pope would make, because her supporters in the Orthodoxy, just like the Tianhai clan, had never appeared.

If one could say that those nephews of hers in the Tianhai clan had chosen to change their stance because her changing of Chen Changsheng's fate revealed that she wanted Chen Changsheng to inherit her throne, then Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan would be the two people most willing to see Chen Changsheng inherit the throne of the Great Zhou, as this meant that Chen Changsheng would not take on the mantle of the Pope.

But neither Linghai Zhiwang or Daoist Siyuan had made any action.

This naturally meant that someone else had acted.

There was only one person that could prevent Linghai Zhiwang

and Daoist Siyuan, Prefects of the Orthodoxy, from making any action or noise.

The Pope.

"Why?" she asked towards the Li Palace.

This was the first time she had asked for an explanation, a reason.

Because she and the Pope had worked together for many years, had an old friendship, had once walked the same path.

"Because your and my view of the world have gradually begun to take two different paths."

The Pope's voice rose from the Li Palace. "In these twenty years after you ascended to the throne, you have used far too many people like Zhou Tong. I know that you wished to protect your authority so as to ensure your way of thinking is carried out. The problem is that authority cannot resolve all problems, and your way of thinking is not what the common populace thinks."

The Tianhai Divine Empress replied, "You are wrong. I do not need authority, but I cannot pass authority on to this rubbish."

The Pope responded, "But there is no existence that lasts forever."

These words referred to her, to him, to all things in the world.

After a very long silence, the Divine Empress replied, "Perhaps you can wait for me for just a little more."

This was the first time she had conceded ground, even if only in words.

Just as was mentioned before, it was not out of fear, but because she and the Pope had worked together for many years, had an old friendship, had once walked the same path.

"In the past, I would certainly have agreed."

The Pope's voice paused for a while before finally rising once more, this time much more sorrowful. "But I no longer have the time."

The Divine Empress's brows slightly rose. She asked, "Why do you no longer have the time?"

The Pope calmly replied, "Because I am going to die."

The Tianhai Divine Empress's brows rose even higher, like swords that wanted to stab at the dome of the night. Her voice also grew sharper. "Why are you going to die?"

The Pope answered, "When one is too old, one will naturally die."

The Divine Empress's eyebrows slowly descended like Phoenix wings, her voice growing somewhat lonesome. "That's right, Heavenly Secrets is going to die, and you are also going to die. In the end, everything is going to die."

The Pope added, "Moreover, tonight, if I do not act, too many people will die, too many."

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Rays of light filled the Great Hall of Light. The stone walls that seemed rather pale in the light noiselessly parted.

The images of sages and gods on the stone walls watched with complicated expressions the man that walked out from within.

Tonight, the Pope was not wearing his hempen robe, but the Divine Robe, and his head bore the Divine Crown. His hand did not hold the Divine Staff, but rather the pot holding the Green Leaf.

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan were kneeling below the stone steps. It was obvious that some seal had been placed upon them that made it impossible for them to move.

Chapter 656 – Perhaps She Always Knew

Linghai Zhiwang gazed at the elder he once regarded as teacher and father, saying, "The Empress has already defied the heavens and changed fate for Chen Changsheng. Why has Your Holiness still made this sort of choice?"

"This matter has nothing to do with Chen Changsheng, nothing to do with Senior Brother. Choices can only be chosen by oneself."

The Pope gazed at the Green Leaf within the pot as he spoke with regret, "Throughout my entire life, I never knew what to choose. Like a blade of grass, I swayed around in whatever direction the wind blew. So it was several hundred years ago, and so it was twenty years ago as well. Senior Brother spoke correctly: I truly am a very useless person. Only at the final moment do I finally act according to my heart, but when that time comes, it is often already too late. Thus, Senior Brother and the Empress broke apart, Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke died. When carefully considered, it should all be considered my fault."

It was said that because of the Orthodox Academy's rebirth, the Pope had ceased supporting the Orthodoxy's new faction in the past two years, causing both Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan to develop a deep resentment for the Pope, but the two of them actually bore no malice towards him. This was because both of them were keenly aware that in the past one thousand years of the Orthodoxy, the Pope was the only true, pure cultivator of the Dao.

Hearing these words, Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan raised their heads, but saw that the Pope now stood in the Sacred Light,

making it impossible to look upon him directly.

Daoist Siyuan said in anguish, "Your Holiness, there is no need to force yourself to choose."

The Pope answered, "My choice is for the benefit of all living beings."

With this statement, he walked out of the Great Hall of Light.

The several thousand priests outside the hall prostrated like a tide.

The Pope gazed towards the Mausoleum of Books and asked, "Is it not better to return together?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress's answer to this proposal was extremely clear, her voice extremely cold. Every word was chock-full of ridicule, perhaps out of disappointment?

"And pass my position on to these idiots? You've truly gone senile, so just die then."

The Pope faintly smiled, knowing that her mood was not very good at this moment, and then he shook his head.

The Green Leaf was no longer in his hands but rather floating behind him in the darkness.

In the gentle caress of the breeze, the Green Leaf slowly shook as if also shaking its head.

With the swaying of the Green Leaf, people began to walk out of the Hall of Pure Virtue a distance away from the Great Hall of Light. Those people were the experts of the Orthodoxy who had sealed themselves away so that they could break through, priests who wished to quietly cultivate and comprehend the Dao. They had already grown used to their lives in the Green Leaf World. After being so suddenly called out, they had rather perplexed expressions, not understanding what was going on.

After a moment, they knew the present situation and their faces instantly turned grave. They congregated with the other priests of the Li Palace and then followed the Divine Avenue out, scattering towards various parts of the capital.

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The Li Palace had finally moved, so the situation in the capital was decided.

Liang Wangsun had left the Lingyan Pavilion. For some reason, the Tang Second Master did not kill him.

The Imperial Guard fell into internal turmoil, the Imperial Palace

resounding with the sound of fighting. Only when Prince Chen Liu took up Emperor Xian's so-called dying wish and took a carriage into the palace was the situation finally brought under some control.

Soon after, several princes arrived, eighteen cardinals leading three hundred priests entered the Imperial City, and the Imperial Palace finally turned silent.

The situation in the Imperial Court was even more complex. The rebellious faction encountered massive resistance, and if not for the firm insistence of the Minister of Rites, the experts of the Ivy Academies led by Principal Zhuang Zhihuan of the Heavenly Dao Academy might have killed even more people tonight.

The unrest in the capital was gradually calmed.

The rebellious factions gradually took control of the situation, but the true outcome was still far from being decided, because the Mausoleum of Books was still there.

There were no armies around the Mausoleum of Books, no cultivators or experts from the outlying provinces and counties, because the level of this battle was far too high.

One after another, people came to the Mausoleum of Books. Even the most unremarkable of them was still an important figure.

Mao Qiuyu had come, and with him was a tall and thin man in a

Daoist robe, as well as a little girl.

Out of the darkness surrounding the Mausoleum of Books, on the other side of that dried-up river, the hidden experts of noble clans and sects began to gradually appear.

The Tang Second Master did not appear. He quietly departed the Lingyan Pavilion and no longer appeared to anyone else. This was the style in which the Wenshui Tangs conducted themselves. When their task was done, they would depart with the brush of their sleeve, and only when the time for rewards came would they appear once more. Not many people knew of just how important a role the Tang clan had played in tonight's coup.

Many people came to the Mausoleum of Books, but the Qiushan clan head left. On the road southwards, when asked by his Guardian, he pondered before replying, "There are too many people."

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Chen Changsheng gazed at the scenes below the Mausoleum of Books in silence, his thoughts a mystery.

In truth, even he didn't know what he was thinking, what he should be thinking.

The tall and thin man by Mao Qiuyu should be the archbishop Daoist Baishi, but just who was the girl?

This girl had a very delicate appearance. Just how did she have the qualifications to stand next to two major figures of the Orthodoxy?

"Mu Jiushi, when did you return from the Great Western Continent?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at the girl and slightly arched her brows.

Hearing this name, even Chen Changsheng's befuddled mind became somewhat clearer.

It turned out that this elegant and fine girl was actually Mu Jiushi, one of the Orthodoxy's Six Prefects?

He had never imagined that this most enigmatic figure of the Orthodoxy was so young, and from the Tianhai Divine Empress's words, did she also have some relationship with the Great Western Continent?

Mu Jiushi gazed up at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books and gave an awkward laugh. "Empress, I only came to serve as a witness. Empress shouldn't be angry at me."

The Tianhai Divine Empress mocked, "If it weren't for that fact it

might seem too ugly, even the demons might have sent someone over tonight."

No one replied to these words, not the Pope who was coming through the darkness or Daoist Ji who had just entered Luoyang.

Because just as she had said, this was truly a shameless affair.

The Tianhai Divine Empress was well aware that on this continent, this sort of shameless affair had occurred many times, and a similar sight had also occurred before.

But she was very sure that she would not suffer the same uninteresting end as that man.

"The supreme experts under the starry sky are still beneath the starry sky, while We have stepped beyond the starry sky."

Chen Changsheng heard her voice but still did not understand, and he could not be bothered to consider these words.

He was still alive. It seemed that his changing of fate had already succeeded, and he could live like this for the foreseeable future. This was a matter very worthy of being happy about, but for some reason, there was not the slightest joy in his heart—he had lost interest in all things. Even this grand and majestic battle sure to be chronicled in the annals of history stirred no interest in him. His mind was blank.

But when he gazed at the occasional black plume of smoke or bright flame rising from the streets of the capital, he was still somewhat concerned.

He didn't know what sort of state the Orthodox Academy was in, just how...those friends who truly cared about him were currently doing.

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The Imperial Guard and the Orthodoxy cavalry had both withdrawn, and were now probably fighting at some other place in the capital.

There was only silence before the gates of the Orthodox Academy. There were fallen leaves in Hundred Flowers Lane, but not a single person.

After Tang Thirty-Six left, he never returned. Zhexiu clearly understood that the reason did not lie with the person himself.

Thus, Zhexiu also left the Orthodox Academy, vanishing into the darkness.

None of the teachers or students could sleep. They stood in front of the library with apprehensive expressions. Some students even proposed that they should go out to look for the principal and the

others.

"No matter what happens, no one is allowed to leave."

Su Moyu gravely warned, "Anyone who dares to take a single step out tonight will be expelled on the spot!"

Hearing this, the somewhat agitated and uneasy students gradually became silent.

Su Moyu ordered several teachers to keep the peace, walked to the academy gate, and said to Ye Xiaolian, "Tonight, I've greatly troubled my junior sisters."

The sword array of South Stream Temple was sufficient to intimidate any faction that wished to use the present chaos to harm the Orthodox Academy.

After Su Moyu finished arranging a few matters, he walked out of the academy gate and gazed out into the dark streets. As he listened to the distant sounds of fighting, his heart felt very heavy.

Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six, Zhexiu, and Xuanyuan Po had all left. At present, only he was left at the Orthodox Academy.

He absolutely had to ensure the Orthodox Academy's safety, and this was also the only thing that he could do.

Ye Xiaolian walked to his side, also looking into the darkness, her elegant and beautiful face covered in concern.

The South Stream Temple disciples were protecting the Orthodox Academy on the Holy Maiden's orders, but after the Holy Maiden went to the Imperial Palace, she never returned. With the capital in chaos tonight, was the Holy Maiden still safe?

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After the bamboo carriage left the capital, it went south. It wasn't long before it was already a thousand-odd li away.

Perhaps because it was somewhat tired, or perhaps because it felt things to be overly boring and dull, the Black Goat stopped at the banks of the Tangwang River.

The starlight falling upon the clear waters of the Tangwang River was cut by the night breeze into countless silver leaves. Shining into the window, they drew countless beautiful silver patterns on the walls of the carriage compartment.

This starlight fell upon Xu Yourong's and Mo Yu's two beautiful faces, yet it seemed to dim them, perfectly matching their current moods.

The ebony hairpin in Xu Yourong's hair made it impossible for

her to move, only allowing her to speak.

She gazed at Mo Yu and said in a soft voice, "Perhaps you have guessed at something."

The palace dress on Mo Yu's body slightly shook, because her body was trembling.

She turned to Xu Yourong, seeming particularly feeble and helpless. She was not at all like the merciless and decisive Grand Lady Mo of the Imperial Court, but like a girl that had suddenly been abandoned.

"What...do you want to say?"

They were the two smartest women in the world. The further they got from the capital, the more composed their minds became, the more numerous their conjectures. Seeming to have received proof from each other's attitudes, they both felt dread in their hearts.

Whether it was the hairpin in Xu Yourong's hair, the Black Goat vacantly gazing in the direction of the capital at the banks of the Tangwang River, or their very own presence here, it was all evidence.

If the Divine Empress was truly confident of her complete control over the capital tonight, why had she made them leave?

Her face somewhat pale, Xu Yourong said, "Let's go back."

After a long period of silence, Mo Yu finally rejected her view, saying, "This is the Empress's decree. We will continue south."

When she spoke, her expression was very calm, but her voice was shaking as if she was on the verge of crying.

Chapter 657 – Three Saints United

The darkness outside the Mausoleum of Books suddenly grew lighter, not because the sun was about to rise, although it truly was very close to dawn, but because a tinge of green had descended. This was an extremely rich green, brimming with life, so much so that the autumn trees in the Mausoleum of Books all seemed to feel somewhat inferior, their branches bending lower.

It was the Green Leaf, its green leaves fat and tender. From just a glance, one would be able to tell that it had been raised extremely well, never missing out on nutrients or fresh water. The surfaces of its leaves were very smooth. From a glance, one could tell that it had been tended to with great care. If even the smallest amount of dust fell upon it, it would be wiped away as quickly as possible by that most esteemed elder using the most expensive towels.

Chen Changsheng was very familiar with this Green Leaf. In the Li Palace, he had seen it far too many times.

This Green Leaf had appeared in the night sky because it had naturally followed the Pope.

The Pope's Divine Robe gently swayed in the breeze.

The Divine Crown upon his head shone with a sacred luster, dazzling in the darkness.

A ripple came from Chen Changsheng's sheath. He knew that the Divine Staff had sensed the arrival of its companions.

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The rain over the capital had ceased, but the rain over Luoyang had intensified.

On the drenched wasteland, only two extremely faint footsteps remained. Daoist Ji had already entered Luoyang. Under the cover of the pouring rain, he had reached the back gate of the Monastery of Eternal Spring.

The Black Dragon formed from clouds and starlight in the night sky had already vanished. In the streets of Luoyang, a howl would occasionally shatter the air, or a streak of black light could be seen.

Suddenly, those harsh howls vanished.

The streak of black light vanished in front of the Monastery of Eternal Spring.

A jade ruyi quietly hovered in the torrential rain.

The horizontal signboard of the Monastery of Eternal Spring was suddenly crushed into powder and then instantly washed away in the rain.

With the moisture of the rain, the opening of the monastery's gate did not make the slightest sound, just like the array energy that suddenly enveloped several streets.

Several dozen Daoist priests sat cross-legged in the pouring rain, their eyes closed as they incessantly recited Daoist scriptures.

Countless Qis that seemed to flicker in and out of existence penetrated through the pouring rain and formed into fence after fence, preventing the jade ruyi from leaving whenever it wished.

Daoist Ji walked out of the pouring rain, walking on the monastery's thousand-year-old path which was covered in potholes, and arrived on the street.

He calmly gazed at the jade ruyi.

Just like he was looking at her.

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By the stream near Xining Village's old temple.

Splash.

The stream water that seemed to have come to a halt suddenly began to move.

This was because the monk had thrust his other bare foot into the water.

The splashing continued.

The monk calmly walked to the other side of the stream.

The stream was not deep, not even reaching up to his knees. It also was not particularly swift, unable to even wash away those blood lotuses. Despite these things, he seemed to walk with extreme difficulty as if each step required breaking through a massive blockade.

Perhaps it was because she stood on the other side of the stream.

She was tall and lofty, her might and pressure striking straight into the soul.

The monk calmly continued forward.

He had a very similar mental strength to hers. Now, approaching her on his own volition required him to suffer greater pain and pressure, to place himself at an even greater disadvantage, even greater danger.

But he still continued forward, steadfast and fearless.

Finally, he was in right in front of her.

The Tianhai Divine Empress calmly gazed at him and asked, "Worth it?"

The monk replied, "It was worth it, because now, you cannot go back."

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Under countless gazes, the Tianhai Divine Empress raised her right hand and thrust it towards the night sky.

A heavy drone suddenly arose over the capital, a frenzied howl of wind, the result of the air being speedily pushed aside.

The trees of the Mausoleum of Books slightly bent in the wind.

A metal spear, in the form of a streak of light, breached the darkness and arrived at the Mausoleum of Books, falling into the Tianhai Divine Empress's hands.

This metal spear was pitch-black, its surface glowing with a faint

golden sheen, but it gave off no sense of luxury, only an incomparable chill.

This golden color was not the shine of gold, but the color of the autumn forest.

Besides the chill and sternness contained within the spear and its autumn forest color, there was nothing too special about this spear's external appearance.

But everyone that saw this spear could sense its boundless power and divine might.

The crowd was shocked and then stern.

The Frost God Spear!

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The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at the Frost God Spear in her hands, looking at the handprint on its shaft, simultaneously seeing an extremely small patch of dark green.

Her brows slightly rose, a hint of anger appearing in her eyes.

With a thought, a golden flame spat out of her palm and instantly burned the Peacock Plume poison off the surface of the Frost God Spear.

Then, she hurled the Frost God Spear to the base of the Divine Path.

Seeing her action, the experts surrounding the Mausoleum of Books were all startled. One by one, they used their greatest techniques, transforming into countless blurs as they made to escape.

In the next moment, they realized that the Tianhai Divine Empress was not attacking them, so their actions could not help but seem rather comical and amusing.

The Frost God Spear transformed into the streak of light landed in the ruins at the end of the Divine Path, and was taken up by Divine General Han Qing.

The Tianhai Divine Empress did not give him any orders, instead turning her gaze to the Pope walking out from the darkness.

Han Qing had broken into the Divine Domain two years ago and his understanding and grasp of the principles of the world were still somewhat lacking in depth, but he had earlier killed Zhu Luo, so his grandeur was at its peak. Taken together with the Frost God Spear in his hand, he was completely capable of doing battle with experts on the level of the Eight Storms, and even held the advantage.

Bie Yanghong was heavily wounded and probably had no more strength to fight. Wuqiong Bi's courage was shattered, but even if she suddenly regained it and exploded with her true might, even if Mao Qiuyu, Mu Jiushi, and those sect elders concealed in the darkness all displayed strength beyond expectations, he would still be able to hold on until that time.

That time was precisely when she defeated her three strongest opponents.

Yes, from the very start, the Tianhai Divine Empress had made this decision.

She had first taken care of Guan Xingke and Bie Yanghong, the two more troublesome of her opponents, sweeping clean the area around the Mausoleum of Books.

Then, she prepared to face off against the Pope, Shang Xingzhou, and the monk who had come from the distant Sacred Light Continent.

The Pope, Shang Xingzhou, and the monk by the stream were all experts above the Storms of the Eight Directions. In terms of the realms of strength used in the continent, they were all Saints.

With such an array of forces, if Zhou Dufu, Chen Xuanba, or Emperor Taizong were reborn, even they would feel in great danger.

But even though she had changed Chen Changsheng's fate and was no longer at her full might, she was still completely confident.

Thunder rumbled from the night sky.

Wind blew through the forest, passing through the rain water on the tree leaves and curling about the Tianhai Divine Empress's body, wafting up her hair and clothes.

She still stood at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, but she had already gone elsewhere.

When not obscured by the clouds, the profuse stars in the night sky were very beautiful and dazzling, but now, they suddenly seemed to lose all their brilliance, because a shadow had cast itself over the world.

It was an absolutely enormous black wing that seemed about to envelop the world, both gloomy and majestic to the extreme.

Thunder was the clear cry of the Black Phoenix.

The black form of the Heavenly Phoenix and the Pope's figure simultaneously vanished into the highest cloud in the night sky.

All starlight was torn to shreds, all clouds thrown into turbulence, ripping away at each other.

Countless lightning bolts constantly flashed in the depths of the thick clouds.

The crowd could faintly see two figures in the clouds, traveling with unimaginable speed through flashes of lightning, yet it was impossible to get a clear view.

Then came the sound of countless rumblings of thunder.

Lightning was the will of the heavens brought down by the two Saints.

Thunder was the ripples brought about by the exchanges of these two Saints.

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An earthquake suddenly ran through Luoyang.

From Peony Park to the Pavilion of Lotus Fragrance, the buildings in a twenty-odd li radius shook on the verge of collapse. Cracks appeared in the street and dust rose up while the populace jolted from their sleep, cried, screamed, and ran in all directions, clueless as to which direction to run in the darkness.

Ten-odd Daoists were sprawled in the rain; whether they were alive was unknown. Their bodies were covered in stones or shattered wood. The Monastery of Eternal Spring had already become a ruin.

The jade ruyi had not been able to break out of this Daoist array, but it had never thought about breaking through and leaving. Just a moment ago, it had broken through the curtains of rain and collided with Daoist Ji's finger.

Two masterly and incomprehensible Qis met, and two ultimate Daoist techniques at this moment released their most powerful might. The Qi of Luoyang began to twist and move like a mountain about to collapse, a sea about to dry up. Even the stars behind the rain clouds trembled in response.

The earth shook, the rain vanished, and Daoist Ji's finger incessantly shuddered. The jade ruyi also incessantly shuddered, causing tiny particles to peel off it and smash countless deep holes in the ground.

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Behind Xining Village's old temple.

The monk walked across the stream and came to her.

He calmly gazed at her and then raised his right hand, jabbing at her forehead.

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This battle occurred at the Mausoleum of Books, at Luoyang, at Xining tens of thousands of li away.

Three Saints simultaneously attacked the Tianhai Divine Empress.

With her body, Dao, and soul, the Tianhai Divine Empress fought them all.

Even the ministers who had the most faith in her also clearly understood that now was the most crucial moment.

Chen Changsheng was nearby, right behind her, so his view was the clearest.

He did nothing, only watched it all.

Logically speaking, it was only right that he be part of the Orthodoxy's faction, he should stand across from the Tianhai Divine Empress, since she and he were not mother and son. Yet she was the entire reason he was alive.

Anyone else would also probably not know how to choose.

Let alone the fact that he was currently very tired and simply didn't want to make a choice.

Yes, he had survived, and it seemed that he would be able to live for a very long time. However, this world that he lived in apparently had already ceased to have any relationship to him.

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The darkness in front of the Mausoleum of Books had been torn apart by the sudden appearance of many figures.

Wind howled like the strongest of crossbow bolts, starlight cut down and deformed, almost as if the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were taking action.

Wuqiong Bi put down the heavily injured Bie Yanghong. Her face full of loathing, she turned to the ruins at the base of the Divine Path. After all, she was one of the Eight Storms, and she still had a formidable capacity to fight.

Mao Qiuyu, Mu Jiushi, and the other Prefects of the Orthodoxy also came to the front of the Divine Path.

With wind flapping against his white sheet of paper, the blood-drenched Xiao Zhang also arrived.

The hidden experts of the noble clans and sects were all silently waiting in the darkness.

Of the experts of the human world, at least half had appeared in front of the Mausoleum of Books. Against these forces, no matter strong Han Qing was, even with the Frost God Spear, how could he resist?

Suddenly, Han Qing found an item in the ruins and used his hands to wipe the dust off it. It was a lunchbox containing rice as well as green peppers with dried pork.

Right after, he did something no one expected.

He began to eat.

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Chapter 658 – I Can Still Eat, No?

The Tianhai Divine Empress's soul was tens of thousands of li away, her Daoist technique was in Luoyang, and her body was in the thunderclouds. One against three, three Saints.

What remained on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books was her original body.

Even if she was the strongest person in the world, it could be presumed that under the condition where she was fighting three Saints, she had no means of producing any more strength to deal with any other enemies.

In other words, the her on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books was currently in the most defenseless state. If someone were to attack her original body, there was a chance of wounding her.

Tonight, many experts had come to the Mausoleum of Books.

They had still not entered the Divine Domain, and normally, they could not pose the slightest threat to the Tianhai Divine Empress, but now was different.

Of course, they first needed to ascend the Divine Path to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

But Han Qing sat below the Divine Path, just as he had for the past six hundred years.

Han Qing was very old.

He was a Divine General of the same generation as Qin Zhong and Yu Gong. He had sat in the Mausoleum of Books for six hundred years, his body covered in dust and speckled with rust, but could he still possibly withstand the collective attacks of these experts of the present era?

This was a question worth pondering, but he was clearly not considering it, because he was eating.

The green peppers fried with dried meat all come from that yard. He quietly ate, seriously ate, perhaps thinking about how two years ago, Xun Mei had stepped upon the Divine Path.

Based on what he had said earlier, it was precisely because Xun Mei had attempted to intrude upon the Divine Path on that night in pursuit of the truth that he had finally put down everything and broken into the Divine. Then, was this food a recollection?

No, this recollection fell in the even more distant past, because that elderly face had even deeper emotions.

The experts of the world had gathered, but he was quietly eating. Did this sort of disregard signify absolute self-confidence or something else?

Two years ago, when Xun Mei had stepped upon the Divine Path

to meet his death, Mao Qiuyu had been outside the Mausoleum of Books. He had personally seen his junior brother die, but now, there was no emotion on his face.

The girl called Mu Jiushi, on the other hand, had a few hints of anger on her face. As for those concealed experts belonging to the noble clans and sects, who were now coming out of the darkness, they also began to grow angry.

The Qis of these experts, carrying their rage, gathered in front of the Divine Path.

Han Qing had no reaction. He was still calmly, silently eating as if this cold food was the world's most precious object.

In the river outside the Mausoleum of Books, the monoliths were shattered into pieces and scattered about the ground.

Wuqiong Bi stood amongst these broken monoliths, the resentment on her face gradually transforming into vigilance and unease, and ultimately, fear.

Tonight, of the Storms of the Eight Directions that had come to the Mausoleum of Books, Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke had died while Bie Yanghong was heavily injured. Only she still had her complete strength.

Earlier, when her husband had been heavily injured, she truly had been furious to the extreme and wished to attack. Even if Han

Qing displayed an incomprehensible strength, with the assistance of those experts in the darkness, she believed that she could defeat him. However...no matter how hateful and harsh her gaze, Han Qing did not even glance at her.

Han Qing quietly ate.

The spear quietly rested by his side.

Thus, she began to fear.

"Help me up."

Bie Yanghong lay amidst the broken monoliths, his face extremely pale, his breathing extremely weak, but his voice was still as calm as usual, containing an admirable strength.

He gazed up at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, his gaze resting on the Tianhai Divine Empress's figure, tinged with confusion and pain.

On the Tianhai Divine Empress's clothes was a slightly moist red petal. On her sleeve were several small holes made by ten-odd shooting stars.

In that bitter battle in the span of a single breath, he was one of the participants, and he clearly understood that these were the gifts left behind by Guan Xingke's death and his heavy injuries.

He also noticed one other problem.

Wuqiong Bi helped him up, the horsetail whisk in her hands faintly shaking, just like her voice. "Let's just go."

"Tonight, since I've already come here, I had no thoughts of leaving alive."

Bie Yanghong calmly said, and then his fingers began to tremble.

The string hanging from his pinkie finger swished into the air, wrapping several times around his fingers.

He was so heavily injured that he didn't even have the strength to make a fist, so he tied all his fingers, binding them into a sort of fist.

This fist struck at the dried-up river bed.

Boom.

This seemingly feeble fist punched a massive hole in the river bed, so deep that its bottom couldn't be seen, and the rushing of water came from below.

When the Imperial Design moved, the river dried up and the stones appeared. Now, with the breaking of the Imperial Design

and the departure of the awe-inspiring array energy, there was no more strength to maintain the current sight.

With a gurgling of water, countless springs bubbled out of the ground. In an instant, the riverbed was drowned once more, soaking the shoes of him and Wuqiong Bi.

Wuqiong Bi knew what he wanted to do. Her face grew even paler, yet she could speak no words of objection.

The springs madly surged, causing the river level to rise with visible speed. Accompanied by the thunder and lightning from high up in the sky, the sight seemed extremely bizarre.

A somewhat despairing shriek burst from Wuqiong Bi's lips.

She and Bie Yanghong stood atop the water, two Qis exuding from their bodies and instantly enveloping the entire river.

The Qi exuded from her body was of silent extinction, blue-green ripples in which no life existed.

The Qi exuded from Bie Yanghong's body, however, was incomparably fresh and clean, containing the infinite and boundless energy of life.

The waters of the river finally poured over its stone embankments and flowed into the Mausoleum of Books, slowly and inexorably surging towards the Divine Path.

As the water flowed, green leaves began to sprout. In the span of a few breaths, they completely covered the surface of the water, a limitless stretch of lotuses.

Soon after, this green lotus sea began to bloom with countless delicate lotus blossoms.

The lotus sea seemed to flaunt itself in the breeze, the lotus blossoms dazzling amidst the thunder and lightning.

Lotus leaves that span to heaven, Wuqiong Bi.

The red sun of lotus blossoms, Bie Yanghong.

(TN: This is actually a line from a poem by Song Dynasty poet Yang Wanli called 晓出净慈寺送林子方, which can be translated as 'Dawn at Jingci Temple, Sent to Lin Zifang'. The translation of the line is 'Lotus leaves that span to heaven, endless green. The red sun of lotus blossoms, a special shade of red.' Wuqiong Bi's and Bie Yanghong's names are the ends of their respective lines.)

The Mausoleum of Books was covered in water.

Mao Qiuyu stood to one side in the water, his expression solemn, his two sleeves dancing.

Two sleeves of breeze stirred up and blew across.

Lotus leaves were constantly flying, lotus blossoms lightly swaying. Lightning illuminated the world, moisture condensed into mist. All this combined into a scene so beautiful as to seem unreal, a fairyland.

The fairyland had come to the Divine Path.

Han Qing was still eating, eating with great seriousness.

Cooking food was a matter of the human world, and he went from the Mausoleum of Books to the human world of the past.

Bie Yanghong wanted him to return to a fairyland that paid no mind to mundane matters, leaving him with no heart to prevent anyone stepping upon the Divine Path.

The sky of lotus leaves and lotus blossoms attacked his Dao heart.

What would Han Qing choose?

Finally, he placed down the lunchbox.

Not because he had no means of dealing with Bie Yanghong's challenge, but because he had finished the food.

He extended his hand to grip the spear and then gazed into the depths of the lotus sea.

Bie Yanghong was in the depths of the lotus sea. His body was drenched in blood and his face was pale, yet he was very calm.

He wanted to kill Tianhai, the people of the world wanted to kill Tianhai, so they had to ascend the Divine Path.

At this moment, he was burning up his true essence and cultivation. Even if he could defeat Han Qing, he would probably have no means of continuing to live.

He did not care, because he had originally come to meet his death.

The path of meeting death was his Dao, his straight Dao.

To walk according to one's Dao meant that one would never get lost in the lotus sea, would never shrink back in fear. His blood-drenched self was clear-cut in the darkness, just like the red flowers amidst the green leaves.

But he did not attack, because he was waiting for the final opportunity.

Waiting for the stream bank near Xining Village's old temple, waiting for the old monastery in Luoyang, waiting for the dark clouds above the earth to scatter.

He raised his head, calmly gazing at the dark clouds.

Everyone gazed up there.

Thunder constantly rumbled, lightning crackled, the dark clouds twisted, the winds erupted.

That place was really not a part of the human world.

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Chapter 659 – One Leaf, One World

This battle was in the human world, yet not in the human world, perhaps because the blows both sides exchanged had already surpassed the scope of humans.

By the stream behind Xining Village's old temple, the monk walked up the Tianhai Divine Empress, his finger jabbing at the center of her brow.

As his finger proceeded forward, the starlight falling from the sky suddenly grew dim and then began to turn as if the starry sky had become fake.

The mental energy from the distant continent and the soul from tens of thousands of li away engaged in direct confrontation, releasing invisible, yet unimaginably mighty ripples of power.

The tree branches, still in the wind, suddenly disintegrated. In the distance, from that fog-covered mountain peak, countless sounds could be heard.

These were the low and fearful howls of monsters, the sounds of their frantic escape, and their miserable yelps.

Countless tiny bubbles appeared in the stream, surging up all over the place as if boiling.

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The torrential rains persisted over Luoyang, but the rain around the monastery had already stopped. The water accrued on the street that was leaping about like it was boiling suddenly became abnormally still, and a shallow layer of frost formed on its surface.

The aftershocks of the earthquake gradually faded, but the surrounding buildings still continued to collapse.

This was the strength of Daoist techniques.

Several dozen invisible lines representing the laws and principles of the world had cut apart all in the darkness, an extremely cold Qi enveloping the entire street.

The jade ruyi had scattered into the darkness, yet it had not truly disappeared. It had already broken free of its solid body and transformed into the purest attack of a Daoist technique.

Daoist Ji stood in front of the monastery, his expression indifferent. Countless faint stars, representing Daoist techniques, flickered about his body.

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A boom suddenly burst out from the night sky above the Mausoleum of Books.

The sea-like field of lotuses below the Divine Path frothed, and those gaily-colored lotus blossoms constantly swayed as if about to drop off, yet they persevered.

Lightning bolts crashed onto the water's surface, starkly illuminating all and also shining upon Han Qing's elderly face.

This boom was not the crashing of thunder but the reverberation produced by the clash of two irresistibly powerful Qis.

The thick clouds in the night sky were torn to shreds by a strong wind and then blown away into countless wisps, and even faint cracks in space could be seen.

A lightning bolt in the midst of forming, without having any time to fall, dispersed back into the void.

With no clouds, there would naturally be no lightning or thunder, nor would a single drop of rain fall again.

The terrifying clash had driven away all things in the night sky, leaving only the clean sky and the many stars gleaming in the distance.

The Tianhai Divine Empress and Pope appeared on two ends of the night sky, separated by several dozen li.

Starlight fell on his and the Divine Empress's body, plating them in silver light, making them seem like gods.

Even this world seemed unable to bear the power of these two.

After a few moments, the ripples produced by this clash of power finally reached the ground.

The water that had spread through the Mausoleum of Books seemed to boil as it surged. Some lotus blossoms finally dropped off and many green lotus leaves were densely covered in holes.

On the other side of the river that had flooded over its banks, houses began to collapse. There were no plumes of dust, only the sound of breaking.

In this brief moment of time, in the southern part of the capital, at least several thousand houses had collapsed, and countless people had died.

The Pope gazed at the miserable state of the capital, listening to those feeble cries for help. After a moment of silence, he gazed into the distance.

Many people were also dying in Luoyang, but what of Xining Village?

A white line extended from the night sky to the ground, and the Pope returned to the streets of the capital, emerging amongst the collapsed streets.

With his appearance, the ripples of power were gradually calmed, ceasing to wreak havoc.

The Tianhai Divine Empress also returned to the peak, her body and shadow becoming one.

The Pope gazed in the direction of the Mausoleum of Books. He raised his hand to the night sky, the Green Leaf appearing in front of his fingers, swaying in the wind.

This pot held the Green Leaf, but there were only four leaves.

The Pope plucked one off.

This action was very simple and, logically speaking, should have been very easy, but his expression was very grave, the vast sea of stars in his eyes instantly growing sluggish in that instant.

When this green leaf was plucked from its stem, a terrifying noise appeared in everyone's ears.

This was the sound of mountain ranges fracturing, great rivers reversing, the heavens collapsing.

The Pope cast this green leaf towards the Mausoleum of Books.

The green leaf was very light, leisurely drifting towards the Mausoleum of Books, with seemingly no power whatsoever.

Yet for the first time, the Tianhai Divine Empress showed a grave expression. Then, she raised her right hand, pointing at some place in the Mausoleum of Books.

The green leaf fluttered in the breeze, drifted in the darkness, slowly advancing.

The breeze gradually crumbled, the darkness shattered, and the space through which the green leaf traveled cracked as if bearing an immense weight, not dissipating for a very long time.

The green leaf had come to the Mausoleum of Books.

The river waters leaped even more fiercely, the green lotuses sprouted towards the night sky as if shaking off the chains of the earth, and the lotus blossoms grew to heights of several feet.

The green leaf came to the Divine Path.

The firm stone steps were covered in the cracks. The tree leaves and gravel on the two sides of the Divine Path madly danced in the green leaf's direction and then vanished as if sucked away into a

vortex.

The monoliths in the mausoleum all reacted to the green leaf's coming. Countless ancient and profound Qis seeped out from the drenched forest and drifted towards the green leaf.

Even the starlight spilling down from the night sky visibly bent, transforming into countless streams of light and shooting towards the green leaf!

Just what sort of Daoist technique was this? To be powerful to this extent! Able to interact with the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, able to alter the trajectory of starlight!

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Chen Changsheng knew that this was no Daoist technique.

He gazed at the slowly drifting green leaf, sensed its boundless might and almost unimaginable pressure and finally understood why his martial uncle the Pope had always taken such great pains in caring for the Green Leaf, why he constantly watered it, wanted it to grow taller and more luxuriant.

The Green Leaf was a miniature world. Within was another heaven and earth, palaces and pavilions, light and wind.

Luoluo had once lived there, and he had once entered it.

This was a real space, a real world. Worlds could be classified into big and small, but to humans, they were all so heavy as to seem limitless.

So no matter whether it was fallen leaves or starlight, all would be drawn to it and then ground into infinitesimal particles of dust.

The Pope used the Green Leaf as a sword, used a world to fight.

Under the shining of the starlight and the twisting of space, the green leaf seemed particularly tiny, yet also particularly majestic.

In this green leaf, Chen Changsheng seemed to see rivers, mountains, an entire city!

Just how could one withstand such an attack?

The green leaf slowly drifted over. It should have been very light, but it gave off an abnormally weighty feeling.

Because it was a world.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's expression grew even graver.

The right hand that she had extended towards some place in the Mausoleum of Books suddenly dropped an inch as if holding some extremely heavy object.

Chapter 660 – Marvel at the Changed World

The green leaf came through the darkness.

The Pope also walked out of the darkness, his face so pale as to seem transparent, the sea of stars within his eyes moving at high speeds like a burning flame.

Just when the Pope had offered his most powerful attack, using the Green Leaf World to strike at the Tianhai Divine Empress, the two battles in Luoyang and the stream tens of thousands of li away also reached their most critical junctures.

The black ruyi that had already dispersed into a Daoist technique scored countless fierce lines in the buildings around the Monastery of Eternal Spring, streaks of clear light flickering in and out of existence. An extremely cold Qi enveloped the entire Daoist monastery, freezing the water in the jars into ice cubes and shattering them. The lights in the monastery were frozen into colored glass and then shattered, and even the lava bubbling out from cracks in the ground instantly froze!

Daoist Ji's Daoist robe turned white, the color of frost, and also of the passing of time. He saw the Black Frost Qi that enveloped the monastery, sensed the ripples of power coming from the Mausoleum of Books, and an expression of profound thought suddenly appeared on his indifferent face. Clear light seeped out of his Daoist robe, flowing like clear water into that glimmering radiance of the stars that represented Daoist techniques.

The Daoists still alive in the Monastery of Eternal Spring spat out blood and incessantly chanted Daoist scriptures.

An extremely complex and difficult-to-understand syllable emerged from Daoist Ji's lips!

This was the final book of the three thousand scriptures of the Dao, the most incomprehensible Dragon language, the essence of the most masterly Daoist technique!

With this syllable, the sky above Luoyang suddenly began to shake, and the Daoist technique that had come from the dispersed jade ruyi momentarily grew sluggish, the Black Frost Qi visibly drawing back through the darkness.

Daoist Ji took out a longsword, the first time he had taken out a sword!

The sword imbued with a Daoist technique slashed down and from the darkness came a shrill howl, carrying no will of its own yet also holding a deep unease, followed closely by a cacophony of shattering!

With these countless tiny shattering sounds, the shattering jars still shattered, along with the transparent chunks of ice within them. The lanterns like colored glass also shattered, the frozen lava also shattered. All shattered into powder, melted into clear water, evaporated into mist. This world of colored glass that had been shattered by frost and ice was once more under the control of clear light!

Tens of thousands of li away, by the stream behind the old temple, the monk had walked up to the Tianhai Divine Empress's body.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's eyes were incomparably bright, golden flames spitting out of them as if a Phoenix was about to be reborn from this place.

This was a pair of true Phoenix eyes.

Her gaze swept all around. The blood lotuses on the stream began to drift up like they were alive and covered the monk's body. Soon after, they crumbled like maple leaves.

Beneath every broken blood lotus, the monk's body also cracked, his skin cracked, but what flowed out was not blood, but a milky white light.

Those rays of light contained an unimaginably sacred energy, almost the same as the Sacred Light of the Li Palace, yet there was a fundamental, and to the beings of this continent, most fatal difference.

This was also Sacred Light, but it came from another world, a world carrying another race that bore an innate hostility to this world.

Countless quantities of Sacred Light surged out of the monk's

body, but the stream behind the old temple made no sound. The boiling water suddenly stopped, and the water converted into mist also grew still.

This was an absolute stillness. Only one thing remained moving: the monk's finger, that finger approaching the Tianhai Divine Empress's forehead.

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The green leaf arrived at the summit of the Mausoleum of Books, confronting the Tianhai Divine Empress.

This was a true world. The trees and stones of the mausoleum sensed its true and incalculable weight and shuddered in unease, sinking down.

If she were still at her peak state, perhaps she would not feel it so troublesome.

But she had already departed from Concealed Divinity, and could no longer preserve her existence within the world nor conceal it within.

If her body, Dao, and soul were all present, perhaps she could firmly block this world, just like that man called Chen Xuanba had done many years ago in the Garden of Zhou.

But her Daoist technique had been broken in Luoyang by Daoist Ji, her soul suppressed by the monk next to Xining Village's stream. Right now, all that was at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books was her body.

Even if she had the body of the true Phoenix, it would still be impossible for her to endure the coming of a world.

What could she do? Would she now fall and burn into nothingness?

Just when everyone looked up towards the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, holding all sorts of emotions, awaiting the arrival of the final moment, an extremely clear Phoenix cry resounded through the night sky!

From Xuelao City to the Longevity Sect, from the Great Western Continent to the Cloud Grave, no sound in the world could be heard other than this Phoenix cry.

This Phoenix cry was extremely tyrannical, extremely proud. The starlight spilling down from the night sky was refracted by the green leaf then torn apart by the Phoenix cry, instantly vanishing into nothingness!

The monsters within the solitary mountain of the Cloud Grave called out in fear. Suddenly, their sounds of escape vanished without a trace, seeming to turn the Cloud Grave into a real grave.

By the stream, the golden flames spitting out of her eyes were painted over with heart-chilling fiendish intent. The stream and stones were all ignited, as were the blood lotus fragments!

The stream moved, the stones moved, the forest moved, and the wind moved.

The breeze brushed against her clothes, and her soul rose up from several dozen zhang until it was several hundred zhang, until it could only be looked up at, until it seemed about to touch the dome of the night. Before this massive figure seemingly formed from the starry sky, the monk in the stream seemed just an ant, the endless Sacred Light exuded by his body seeming just like insignificant lights, instantly suppressed until they were on the verge of extinction!

Simultaneously, in Luoyang, the shreds of the Daoist technique torn apart by the sword fell to the ground. The blood of the true Phoenix suddenly appeared out of nothingness and melded with the lava, beginning to burn all things.

The black dragon that had earlier appeared in the night sky above Luoyang suddenly appeared once more. This time, however, it had a pair of wings which tore through a scene rendered fantastical by mist and smoke, its Phoenix claws stretching out like lightning bolts to grab the Daoist sword in Daoist Ji's hands, and its Phoenix beak a descending star, pecking at Daoist Ji's eyes, accompanied by that clear and ruthless Phoenix cry!

She was at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, gazing at the green leaf, her expression indifferent.

This place was the highest point in the capital because she stood there, and it was only right that she stand at the highest point. The moment she stepped aside, this place would no longer be so high and dangerous, and she would no longer be herself. So from the very beginning, she never had any plans of avoiding this green leaf. Her choice was to firmly receive it. But what could she use to receive it?

The green leaf was a world. Even divine weapons such as the Frost God Spear or the Halving Blade would not be able to block it.

Her right hand had sunk down as if it had snatched something up in the night sky.

It was a very heavy item, neat and square, but it was not a weapon.

It was a monolith.

Chen Changsheng looked over and found the lines on the monolith to be somewhat familiar. Then he realized, and he was struck speechless.

This monolith was the Reflecting Monolith!

A Heavenly Tome Monolith!

The Tianhai Divine Empress had extended her hand to grab the Reflecting Monolith from the mausoleum!

Then, the green leaf smashed down!

When she grabbed the Heavenly Tome Monolith, her sleeve was torn to shreds.

When she waved the Heavenly Tome Monolith, the entire night sky was torn to shreds.

The Heavenly Tome Monolith heavily struck the green leaf.

The green leaf was very soft and tender, the monolith very heavy and hard. When the two met, it should have been like a dry leaf falling in the water, a piece of paper falling in the stove. There shouldn't have been much noise.

But for this meeting, that would definitely not be the case.

If one said that thunder was ear-splitting, then if all thunder that occurred from the very beginning of time until tonight simultaneously boomed out, what sort of sound would that be?

Boom!

The Mausoleum of Books which had never undergone any change

seemed to leave the earth, shaking three times.

The buildings in the south of the capital that had just stabilized instantly collapsed like a sandcastle blown over in the wind.

The trees of the mausoleum were all shattered, their pieces sent flying.

The lotus sea that flowed freely through the Mausoleum of Books was jolted upwards, a line of water several dozen li long circling the Mausoleum of Books.

A hole appeared in the night sky.

The sea of stars seemed to change shape.

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(TN: This title is from the poem 'Swimming' by Mao Zedong. It is the final line, the full line being, 'The goddess if still here would marvel at the changed world'.)

Chapter 661 – The Kindness of a Single Meal

The clouds in the night sky were completely driven to the edge of the horizon. The stars were incomparably bright. The river water had risen from the earth and transformed into a mist dozens of li long that surrounded the Mausoleum of Books like a belt, with green lotus branches and pink lotus blossoms drifting in and out, a most beautiful sight.

Compared to this mystical beauty that seemed not part of this human world, the true human world was in incredible misery. The buildings in the southern part of the capital had either collapsed or been toppled over by the surging water. An uncountable number of people had died. Cries for help and sobs of pain rose and fell in turn. Although they were rendered indistinct by the distance, it still made those in the distance shudder in fear.

Those cultivation experts who had borrowed the darkness to surround the Mausoleum of Books had been even more affected by the aftershocks from the collision of the Green Leaf World and the Heavenly Tome Monolith. Some priests who were somewhat lacking in cultivation had been jolted to death and the elders and Guardians of the noble clans and sects had their own manner of injuries. The face of the girl called Mu Jiushi was snow-white, a trickle of blood hanging down from the corner of her lips. Her expression was now very gloomy, with none of its earlier brightness and cheer remaining. Only Mao Qiuyu, Wuqiong Bi, and Bie Yanghong were unaffected, as they stood in the middle of the lotuses and were able to use the pacifying and softening influence of the water to protect themselves.

The green leaf slowly drifted back into the night sky from the

peak of the mausoleum. A massive gale seemed to stir up from nothing.

The crowd looked from the green leaf back to the peak to gaze upon the figure of the Tianhai Divine Empress with both fear and reverence mixed together, powerless to speak.

The Heavenly Tome Monoliths were very large, very upright and square. Logically speaking, there was no way to grip one in the hand.

But she had just so casually gripped a Heavenly Tome Monolith in her hand, or perhaps carried it.

The Pope's Green Leaf was a real world and possessed an almost limitless weight, capable of crushing all things. Even the Frost God Spear or the Halving Blade could not resist it, but the Heavenly Tome Monoliths had descended to the world at the beginning of time. The blowing of the wind or the beating of the rain, the shifting of space or the passing of time—none of them could change their appearances. From this point, one could say that the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were close to eternal existences, indestructible existences. It was just like that famous fable in the Daoist scripture 'On the Origin of Turtles': what would happen when the impenetrable shield encountered the unstoppable spear?

Fables were fables and did not give a real answer. The first meeting of the green leaf and the Heavenly Tome Monolith also did not give a conclusion. Based on these observations, the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were the most suitable and most powerful weapons for resisting the Green Leaf World, but other

than the Tianhai Divine Empress, who possessed such terrifying strength as to carry a Heavenly Tome Monolith in one's hand as a weapon? And who had such an imposing manner as to dare think of using a Heavenly Tome Monolith as a weapon?

The world marveled at the changes this battle had wrought, but it was not yet over. It had just begun. The starlight once more refracted, space once more twisted, and the green leaf drifted once more to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

Rivers, mountains, and cities were all within. There was a cacophony of noises: the splitting of earth, the moving of mountains, the snapping of rivers, the second descent of a world.

The Tianhai Divine Empress carried the monolith and smashed it once more at the green leaf.

Unlike last time, there was no sound. Let alone all thunder from the beginning of time, there wasn't even the dying chirp of an insect in the autumn rain, only a stillness.

This was because all weight, energy, and Qi were being perfectly transferred between the green leaf and the monolith, not a single strand being released into the world.

The peak of the Mausoleum of Books suddenly sank half a foot.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's face paled, and a stream of blood flowed from her hand, staining a corner of the monolith red.

The Pope's face paled even more and his Divine Crown now seemed caked in dust, the wrinkles on his face so deep as to seem like a yellow plateau which had seen no rain for one thousand years.

The belt of water several dozen li long around the Mausoleum of Books fell to the ground as a torrential rain.

The green leaf, like a moist piece of paper, stuck to the surface of the Heavenly Tome Monolith and incessantly shook, the surface of the leaf gradually tearing apart.

It was very obvious that in this clash of ultimate powers, the Tianhai Divine Empress had gained the advantage!

The two greatest masters of the Dao in the past one thousand years of the Orthodoxy's history and the enigmatic monk from the other continent were all supreme experts on the level of Saints.

With a Heavenly Tome Monolith in hand, the Tianhai Divine Empress fought three separate battles with her body, soul, and Dao. Not only did she not fall behind, she was even faintly about to grasp victory in all three battles!

Such an overbearing display, such power! No matter what the final result was, everyone was forced to admit that she was the supreme expert under the starry sky!

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The highest point was the peak and someone at the strongest point could no longer get any more powerful. The Phoenix danced amongst the nine heavens, but it would ultimately have to descend.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's battle with these three Saints had reached its most critical point. She had displayed a nigh unimaginable level of strength, and also her complete strength.

This also meant that she could not produce an even more inconceivable method.

Bie Yanghong clearly understood this argument. He knew that the moment he had been waiting for had finally come.

He glanced at Wuqiong Bi and then the string tied to his finger began to snap, inch by inch.

With a pale complexion, Wuqiong Bi wildly waved the horsetail whisk in her hands, gathering the several dozen snapped pieces of string within it.

This Qi of silent extinction that seemed like the cold waves of some dead sea was suddenly mixed with a vivid Qi of life. These two utterly different Qis not only did not attack each other, but

instead, in an extremely short amount of time, truly fused with each other, producing an indescribably ancient aura.

Life and extinction had originally been two sides of the same coin. Only when they interacted with each other would the true face of the world be revealed.

The lotus leaves incessantly swayed, the lotus blossoms in chaos within. A strand of Qi madly charged up the Divine Path, imbued with a power beyond compare. The space in front of the Mausoleum of Books was pervaded by an ancient aura.

They were the only couple amongst the Storms of the Eight Directions. It could also be said that in the entire world, no couple other than the White Emperor couple was stronger than them.

When they truly joined hands and unleashed their most powerful attack, even someone as strong as the Tianhai Divine Empress had to treat them with caution.

But right now, all the Tianhai Divine Empress's strength was in the Heavenly Tome Monolith, her Daoist technique was in Luoyang, and her soul was tens of thousands of li away, so how could she deal with it?

Deep within the lotus sea was a ruin. There was once a pavilion here, at the base of the Divine Path. Anything that wished to step upon the Divine Path, whether man or Qi, needed to pass through here.

When Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi's ancient aura swept towards this place, a sigh could be heard.

This sigh was similarly brimming with an ancient aura. It seemed very disappointed and frustrated.

A hand gripped a pitch-black spear.

A violent gale stirred in the Mausoleum of Books and the lotus sea began to ripple, the lotus leaves swaying and casting pearl-like drops of water into the sky.

This spear was not as ordinary as it appeared. It was the strongest spear in the world, even the strongest divine weapon in the past one thousand years.

Han Qing gripped the spear and pointed it into the depths of the darkness.

A bleak autumn wind swept through.

Everything in the world must wither.

In the depths of the lotus sea, Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi groaned.

Han Qing indifferently gazed in their direction. He did not speak, nor did he look to his feet.

At his feet was a lunchbox.

The rice, green peppers, and dried meat had long since been completely consumed. At the moment, the only thing present was some water, swishing about.

Wherever the spear pointed, the green leaves of the lotus would wither away like some hungry ghost was tied to their yellowed stalks.

He gazed at the swiftly wilting lotus sea, thinking of how, many years ago, he had walked from the north, encountering many corpses on his journey.

The people of his race and humans were very different, but when starving to death, they strangely became rather similar, perhaps because they all dried up and withered away.

He had not starved to death, but he was about to become a ghost—his eyes were greener than those of the wolf mounts, and he was so thin that only skin and bones remained.

Just when he believed that he would never walk out of the snowy plains, he encountered His Majesty.

His Majesty had a very warm expression, but a soaring countenance. His words were concise and forceful.

His Majesty asked, "Han Qing, are you hungry?"

Han Qing nodded.

His Majesty said to Han Qing, "Then follow me from now on and you will have your fill of wine and meat."

Han Qing thought for a very long time and then nodded.

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After one thousand years.

Gazing at the lotus sea, at those withering lotus leaves and lotus blossoms like hanged ghosts, hungry ghosts, drowned ghosts, Han Qing nodded his head once more.

Then he stirred up all the power in his body and cast the spear!

The spear howled through the air, startling the heavens and earth, ghosts and gods weeping at its sound.

Before the spear, the lotus blossoms dispersed, the entire world withered, life and death became one.

The spear was like a boat breaking through the water, a stalk of grass breaking through a shadow, an arrow breaking through the clouds, straight through the center of the sky.

Where was it going?

The depths of the lotus sea?

Into the green leaf?

The old monastery of the ancient capital or the old temple tens of thousands of li away?

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Chapter 662 – Autumn Slaying

By the stream near Xining Village's old temple, the starry sky was obscured. All was dark and quiet.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's soul stood between heaven and earth, the occasionally appearing star like a speckle on her clothes.

She looked down upon the monk by the stream, her expression indifferent as if she was gazing at an ant.

The stream bank was very quiet, as was the mist-shrouded solitary mountain. At this moment, it was close to a deathly stillness.

On the still surface of the stream were blazing pieces of blood lotus. On the monk's body, there were also many pieces of blood lotus. His monk robes were tattered, his flesh was cracked, and Sacred Light burst out like a flower.

An indescribably divine might descended from the heavens and crushed the Sacred Light exuding from the monk's body like the light of a firefly.

The dimmer the Sacred Light became, the more serene the monk's expression was.

Heavily wounded by the Tianhai Divine Empress's soul, his body was covered in blood, his face covered in blood, yet his two serene

eyes were devoid of emotion, other than pity.

Just who was he pitying? This world that he had not returned to in so long or his clansmen still on that distant other continent?

No, at this time, he was looking at the Tianhai Divine Empress, so the pity in his eyes was for her.

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In Luoyang, Daoist Ji was also looking at the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Mist flitted about the darkness, seeming both like a fairyland and the kingdom of the dead, but there was no sign of her body.

Her supreme Daoist technique was in the mist, flying through the air in the form of a Phoenix.

The misty Phoenix's claws had fallen on his Daoist sword, its beak pecking at his face like a thunderbolt.

His face was covered in countless lines, each line a law of the world.

As the beak fell, a sound carrying fear resounded high up in the sky.

The clear light dissipated, the Daoist technique was shattered, and the lines on his face bent like wrinkles or old wood. Blood appeared from nowhere and splashed into the darkness.

Daoist Ji gazed at the misty Phoenix with no emotion on his face. No wariness, no pity, only calm.

This sort of extreme calm was very frightening because it was like he was looking at a corpse.

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The southern part of the capital outside the Mausoleum of Books was still a vast stretch of water. Trash and stone rubble floated atop the filthy water, as well as many corpses.

The Pope stood in the water, letting the filth submerge his knees and soak his Divine Robe. His face was pale as if transparent, and his wrinkles made him seem particularly sorrowful.

He held the Green Leaf, his gaze looking through the lotus sea surrounding the mausoleum and ultimately falling on the figure standing at the peak.

The vast sea of stars in the Pope's eyes quickly dimmed from the shock and then became even more sorrowful.

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By the stream outside Xining Village's old temple, the starlight suddenly somewhat brightened. The stream waters also brightened and then began to flow.

The tree branches by the stream also began to sway in the wind. The blood lotuses on the monk's body fell to the stream and continued to burn, gradually transforming to ash.

All that was still began to move from the moment the stars brightened.

There was still not much sound in the world. The uncountable number of beings living around the solitary mountain were all bowing on the ground, shuddering, not even daring to look towards the stream, so they naturally did not know why the starlight had brightened.

The reason the starlight had brightened was that the figure that had extended from heaven to earth had become cracked, thus revealing a few stars.

This crack was very large, enough to hold a few mountains. Looking up from the ground, it was as if a great hole had been torn through the night sky.

The radiance of the stars seeped out of this hole, looking just like blood.

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In Luoyang.

The Daoist monastery was still a ruin.

Daoist Ji stood amidst the ruins, the countless lines on his face already bent and on the verge of collapsing, also looking just like a ruin.

There was still no emotion on his face. He only calmly gazed at the Phoenix in the mist.

The misty Phoenix's two wings were completely unfurled, spanning across two long streets. As they swayed, roofs and stones were sent flying, and then they turned still.

The lightning in the night sky vanished, the beak left the sword, and Phoenix eyes seemed to be faintly crumbling.

Perhaps it was because in the center of the misty Phoenix's body, beneath those two wings, a large hole had appeared.

The white mist, the hot mist, the cold mist, slowly flowed out of this hole, looking just like blood.

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The peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

This green leaf left the surface of the Heavenly Tome Monolith, slowly and heavily retreating into the darkness like some immortal bird heavily injured and finding it difficult to fly.

Only a few people could clearly make out that the green leaf had been heavily damaged. Two thirds of the leaf had already crumbled away, only the thin veins of the leaf keeping everything connected. It looked extremely wretched.

No one looked at this green leaf because everyone was staring in shock at the Tianhai Divine Empress.

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed tens of thousands of li at Xining Village, gazed at Luoyang, gazed at the capital, and a faint sense of confusion appeared in her beautiful Phoenix eyes, which

transformed into a tiny hint of pain.

Her Black Phoenix wings were already unfurled, slowly beating in the air.

The lotus sea, those lotus blossoms, the ancient aura, had just now reached her and then been scattered by her black wings to beyond the nine heavens.

Even at this moment when she was using her most powerful methods to deal with the most powerful attacks of three Saints, she had still had a backup plan, not leaving her opponents a single gap to attack.

But she had not expected that Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, the couple that had resolved to die, had not been the final strike of her enemies.

To be more precise, she had not expected just who her final enemy was.

The slight confusion and pain in her eyes vanished, leaving only indifference.

She gazed at her own body.

A spear had run through her body, tearing a gaping hole through her abdomen.

This spear seemed very ordinary. It was pitch-black, with no carvings on its surface.

This was naturally no ordinary spear, or else how could it pierce through her body?

Blood surged out of the wound, like mist and like starlight.

The spear began to burn, spurting out countless enchanting fragments of stars, simultaneously emitting an extremely profound aura of autumn chill.

The Tianhai Divine Empress lowered her head to gaze at this spear that ran through her body, saying, "This is Autumn Slaying?"

Not waiting for an answer, she continued somewhat emotionally, "It has been many years since last I saw it."

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Whether it was the Tianhai Divine Empress on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books or everyone below the mausoleum, they all knew that this spear was the Frost God Spear, ranked first on the Tier of Legendary Weapons.

The Autumn Slaying the Tianhai Divine Empress spoke was naturally not the name of the spear.

This was the spear technique of the Frost God Spear, the supreme divine technique which Emperor Taizong used to stride across the world.

After Emperor Taizong returned to the sea of stars, the Frost God Spear had remained in the Imperial Palace. As for Autumn Slaying, it had never appeared again in the human world.

Until tonight, it finally reappeared in Han Qing's hands.

As it turned out, this spear which brought life and death together was not going to the depths of the lotus sea, nor into the green leaf, nor to the old monastery in the ancient capital, nor that old temple tens of thousands of li away.

The spear went to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

To kill Tianhai.

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Chapter 663 – A Battle of One Thousand Years

Blood flowed out from the Tianhai Divine Empress's abdomen, flowing along the spear and falling to the ground, then transforming into golden flames in the wind.

Nevertheless, her face illuminated in the fire's glow was still pale and devoid of color, just as her eyes were devoid of emotion.

Autumn Slaying was truly a fine slayer.

"I truly did not think it would be you. Because in my eyes, you were born lofty and unsullied. Although not a human, you value the ties of friendship more than anyone else."

As she spoke, she finally ceased to use 'We' to address herself. Perhaps there was some deeper meaning, or because she was in pain, or out of habit.

She had made a habit of treating this person, or not a person, as someone on an equal level.

The lotus sea below the Divine Path had been blown into disorder by the wind. It looked just like a rice paddy awaiting harvest that had suffered a sudden torrential rain.

The spear was still as an autumn wind gradually stirred. Frost

descended over the world and the edges of the lotus leaves were tinged in white, the pink lotus blossoms seeming to freeze.

Han Qing stood in the lotus sea, his figure seeming very lonely. It was simply impossible to associate this person with the one who had just used the Frost God Spear, executed Autumn Slaying, to change history.

Everyone around the Mausoleum of Books was stunned. No one noticed the important information the Tianhai Divine Empress had concealed in her words.

He gazed at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, his elderly face somewhat at a loss. "Ties of friendship?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress suddenly smiled, her face rather pale.

"Yes, for a Demon Crown Prince that has lived amongst humans for one thousand years, where his ties of friendship lie is truly a problem."

There was a deathly stillness around the Mausoleum of Books. When everyone heard these words, they were even more stunned, and countless gazes fell upon Han Qing's body.

Divine General Han Qing was actually not a human, but a demon? And he was also the Crown Prince of the demons?

A Demon Crown Prince had actually risked life and limb for the Great Zhou! In the war against the demons, he had bravely led the vanguard, all the way until he became the number one Divine General of the continent!

A Demon Crown Prince was actually willing to guard the Mausoleum of Books for six hundred years all the way until tonight, receiving the deep love, respect, and trust of the populace?

Even deeper within the lotus sea, Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi had no reaction.

In the darkness, the Pope also said nothing.

It was very obvious that these experts of the Divine Domain had already known of this secret.

The Tianhai Divine Empress calmly asked him, "Why do you wish to kill Us?"

After a very long period of silence, Han Qing replied, "I am a Demon Crown Prince, but I am even more a loyal minister of the Great Zhou."

The Tianhai Divine Empress countered, "If you are a loyal minister, then you should be loyal to Us."

"This is His Majesty's final order; I must carry it out," Han Qing

said to her.

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at the lotus sea and leisurely said, "It turns out that even today, to you, in the Great Zhou, Emperor Taizong is still the only Majesty."

Han Qing replied, "To me, Empress, you are also a Majesty."

The Tianhai Divine Empress suddenly asked, "How did Taizong treat you?"

After a moment's pause, Han Qing replied, "His Majesty treated me like his hands and feet."

The Tianhai Divine Empress sneered, "Those hands and feet of yours are already dead, now hanging in the Lingyan Pavilion."

Han Qing did not speak because he did not know what to say.

The Tianhai Divine Empress continued, "Emperor Taizong used you and also doubted you. Before he died, he compelled you to make an oath to the starry sky that you would guard the mausoleum for the rest of your life, never stepping out into the world. Otherwise, six hundred years ago, you would have broken into the Divine Domain. Ultimately, it was Us that found a way to remove the bindings on your body. We have treated you with kindness."

Han Qing took a deep breath and said, "Empress treated me as an

intimate friend. Back then, no matter what the Elder of Heavenly Secrets or the Pope said, Empress always treated me with extreme trust, assisting me in the disputes and dangers far from the world, assisting me in breaking the oath I made to the starry sky. Your kindness to me was as deep as the sea."

The Tianhai Divine Empress added, "We even promised you that you would assuredly lead the army to invade Xuelao City and personally kill the Demon Lord."

Hearing this, the gazes resting on Han Qing's body became even more solemn. They did not know what sort of grudge lay between this mysterious Demon Crown Prince and the Demon Lord that made him leave Xuelao City one thousand years ago and even want to personally kill the Demon Lord.

"Principal Shang made a similar promise." Han Qing fell silent, then continued, "If I could complete His Majesty's final order, the Demon Lord would also die tonight."

Luoyang was very quiet.

Yet these words were like a clap of thunder.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's face revealed a slight disappointment. "Is that so? He is also going to die?"

This sentence contained the word 'die' and 'also'.

Han Qing heard this and for some reason, the armor on his body became countless times heavier and he found it somewhat difficult to breathe.

"Empress's kindness to me was as weighty as a mountain, as deep as the sea...far above His Majesty.

"But His Majesty's kindness comes first. If not for His Majesty, I would have died a thousand years ago.

"I dare not forget the kindness of a single meal because...it was the beginning of everything."

When he said this, his voice trembled, not at all confident. It was like he trying to forcefully convince someone, or perhaps convince himself.

Matters had come to this; there was no need for more words.

Words had come to this, had come to the end.

The Tianhai Divine Empress lost any interest in speaking with him. Her gaze moved upward from the lotus sea to the distant capital.

The occasional fire could be seen on the streets, accompanied by shouts and yells. It was in chaos, but there was one place that was very peaceful, a stretch of pitch-black.

"Even though you've been dead for so many years, are you still not willing to let me go?"

That man had been dead for several hundred years.

As a woman, she had ascended to the imperial throne and expelled his descendants from the capital, showering upon them limitless humiliation. She had thought that she had succeeded in returning all the suffering she had received, had emerged the final victor, but only tonight did she realize that even after so many years, she was still battling with that man.

That place was the Great Zhou Imperial Palace, the Orthodox Academy, and the Hundred Herb Garden.

Many years ago, she had lived in these places, fought in these places, encountered many people and matters.

Only now did she finally understand that nothing had truly changed.

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"Now, you should be able to die, no?"

In front of the Daoist monastery in Luoyang, Daoist Ji gazed at the gradually dimming Phoenix in the mist. He seemed somewhat exhausted.

"Please leave in a good fashion."

By the stream near Xining Village, the monk gazed at the gradually dimming soul, his expression somewhat sorrowful.

"I'm sorry."

In the darkness of the capital, the Pope looked at her on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, his elderly face brimming with anguish.

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The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at the world and slightly raised her brows.

She was in some pain.

The Frost God Spear had pierced through her abdomen, simultaneously dealing unmendable wounds to her body, soul, and Dao.

She could already sense that the time to leave had come. This was a matter impossible to reject, just like how her blood blazed into smoke and returned to the blue sky.

A ruthless, cruel, powerful and furious Phoenix cry resounded from the peak of the Mausoleum of Books and then spread to the entire world.

Her black hair madly danced behind her as her Phoenix wings tore through the night sky.

She gripped the spear and pulled it out of her abdomen.

One could imagine the pain from just looking at this scene, but she showed no expression on her face, not even dropping her raised eyebrows.

Chapter 664 – The Final Choice

Inch by inch, the spear was pulled from the Tianhai Divine Empress's abdomen, just like bamboo sprouting from the muddy ground of a forest after the rain. Yet what it carried was not beads of water, but blood. Phoenix blood soaked the spear, soaked her hand, fell on the flagstones at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, and then fiercely burned like sacred flames.

In the light of the flames, her figure was exceptionally clear, her madly dancing black hair and her Phoenix wings cast into an even gloomier darkness.

A ruthless, wrathful, almost insane Phoenix cry spread from the peak of the Mausoleum of Books to every part of the world. In an instant, it enveloped the entire capital. Many cultivators of lower cultivation were immediately knocked unconscious, and some people that were too close exploded, their bodies transforming into blossoms of blood.

The spear was finally pulled completely out and gripped in the Tianhai Divine Empress's hand.

Covered in blood, she stood on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, tottering on the verge of collapse.

This entire stretch of the night sky was devoid of clouds, yet somehow, a few drops of rain fell upon her face of unparalleled beauty.

It seemed that she would fall at any moment, but ultimately, she did not fall.

With a crack, a bolt of lightning fell, illuminating the summit of the Mausoleum of Books and driving away those raindrops, letting everyone see the sight on the peak.

A spear fell together with this lightning bolt.

The Frost God Spear fell upon the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, still held firmly in her left hand.

For an instant, the mausoleum fiercely shuddered.

She waved her right hand, the Heavenly Tome Monolith in her hand striking against the darkness in front of the Mausoleum of Books.

There seemed nothing in the darkness, but as the Reflecting Monolith whistled through the air, it smashed a path through the night sky and reached the ruins of the southern part of the capital, several li away.

The green leaf on the Heavenly Tome Monolith crumbled in the process, unraveling into countless gossamer strands that curled around the Pope.

The Pope extended his hand, raising up the Green Leaf in the night sky and bringing it before his body.

In absolute silence, a clear light flashed and then vanished. The Reflecting Monolith vanished, returned to its place in the Mausoleum of Books.

The green leaf had also truly disappeared. In the pot, only three leaves remained.

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The Tianhai Divine Empress's body, Dao, and soul were all heavily injured. Not even the slightest chance of living remained and she was on the verge of returning to the sea of stars.

This was a matter that everyone had already confirmed, but they had similarly confirmed that as the true ruler of the continent after Emperor Taizong, a powerful figure whose marks left on history could never be erased, the Divine Empress would never quietly die. It was not at all in accordance with her nature.

Before she left the human world and returned to the sea of stars, what sort of crazed actions she would perform, which things she would bring with her into destruction, nobody knew.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood on the summit and looked down upon the world, her expression indifferent, her body drenched in blood, a god, and also a demon.

The entire world began to feel fear.

The lotus sea rippled and the lotus blossoms bloomed, enclosing Wuqiong Bi within.

After doing all this, Bie Yanghong supported his heavily wounded body to stand in front of Mao Qiuyu.

Mu Jiushi had long since vanished. The elders of the noble clans and sects retreated once more into the darkness, not daring to meet the Tianhai Divine Empress's gaze. Everyone waited for the arrival of the final moment, but they were also well aware that the Divine Empress's final strike before she left the world would be left for those truly important figures and not themselves.

The Tianhai Divine Empress turned her gaze to Luoyang.

The darkness in front of the monastery crumbled away, the misty phoenix crumbling with it, transforming into countless cracks in space that charged towards Daoist Ji.

Daoist Ji's expression instantly turned solemn. Several strange and incomprehensible syllables burst from his lips and a wooden sword flew out of the ruins of the monastery, transforming into a streak of dazzling light that seemed to messily cleave at the darkness. At the same time, his figure vanished into the void as he endeavoured to escape.

Countless streams of blood splattered across the night sky of Luoyang, a line of blood ten-odd li long.

Daoist Ji broke out of the night sky and fell upon the street, his body covered in wounds and blood.

Despite the final book of the three thousand scriptures of the Dao, an ode in Dragon language, and the cleaving of his wooden sword, he still had been unable to resist the Tianhai Divine Empress's Daoist technique. In the end, however, he had survived.

The Tianhai Divine Empress paid no more attention to Luoyang. Drawing back her gaze, she looked towards some nameless street of the capital.

At this time, the Pope stood on this street, stood in the floodwaters, stood amongst the collapsed houses and corpses.

The Pope looked up at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, looked at this world that had had its fill of disaster and misfortune tonight, with naught but pity and sorrow upon his elderly face.

The entire world was extremely quiet, waiting for the final battle between these two Saints.

Suddenly, the Pope placed down the Green Leaf in his hands.

Cries of alarm arose from all over in the darkness. Soon after, countless whistling sounds could be heard as countless experts of

the Li Palace, caring not for the Tianhai Divine Empress's gaze, charged with all their might towards him.

Because they could clearly see that the Pope was prepared to let go.

The Pope was prepared to leave this world together with the Tianhai Divine Empress, returning to the sea of stars!

Time seemed to pass slowly, but in truth, it proceeded at its normal speed.

Nothing happened.

The world was still very quiet.

The Green Leaf floated in the waters filled with corpses and rubble.

On the summit of the Mausoleum of Books, the corners of the Tianhai Divine Empress's lips perked upwards, revealing a mocking smile.

She jeered at her once-companion.

Truly uninteresting.

Why should We act according to your heart?

Divine General Han Qing stood on the end of the Divine Path, gazing at the peak, his eyes holding a somewhat complex expression.

The Pope had placed down the Green Leaf, yet the Divine Empress did not move against him.

But even if I had truly been able to put down the lunchbox, the Empress would probably not let me go, right?

Those tangled and complicated emotions instantly vanished as Han Qing truly composed himself, waiting for the moment when the spear pierced through his body.

Suddenly, the starlight at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books scattered.

A straight path appeared in the night sky, followed soon after by the thundering howl of a spear!

With a wave of her sleeve, the Frost God Spear pierced like a thunderbolt through the darkness, soaring towards a certain place in the capital.

She did not even glance at Han Qing. This sort of disregard represented her true emotions and attitude.

The Frost God Spear returned to the place where it should have remained: the Great Zhou Imperial Palace.

An extremely heavy thump arose from the distant capital, following soon after by the sound of a collapsing building.

Before her eyes rose his high tower, the tower built by him.

Soon the tower will collapse. We will destroy your tower.

The tower completely collapsed and fell to the ground, smashing into pieces.

Just like that, the most famous building in the capital in the past several centuries, the symbol of the Great Zhou Dynasty, the Lingyan Pavilion, vanished.

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A torrential rain was still pouring over the Chenggong Mountains, corpses scattered amongst the puddles of rain. The sixth-ranked Divine General of the continent, Tian Chui, had been the Divine Empress's most loyal subordinate. The Han Province Army that he led was the most powerful of all the Great Zhou Northern Army. Tonight, although they had suffered a sudden

ambush, they had still put up the fiercest resistance and suffered the most miserable deaths.

The Principal of Star Seizer Academy, Chen Guansong, gazed at the wide-eyed corpse of Divine General Tian Chui, his face pale, and a tinge of apology in his eyes. Tonight, if not for the fact that he had come with his identity as a respected teacher and led the army and experts of the Tianhai clan to successfully ambush Tian Chui, it would have simply been impossible to stop the advance of the Han Province Army.

"As your teacher, I will bring your last will into reality, leading the army to invade Xuelao City, so Tian Chui...close your eyes and die content."

An indifferent voice suddenly arose from the rainy night.

"Do you feel that you are qualified for this?"

Chapter 665 – The Darkness Before Dawn

Chen Guansong possessed an extremely senior status within the Great Zhou Army and was extremely skilled at patiently enduring. Obtaining the deep trust of the Divine Empress, he had managed Star Seizer Academy for many years, many of his students and disciples serving in the army. His strength was unfathomable, and he had long been a half step from the Divine. In this early autumn rebellion, he played an extremely important role. If nothing out of the ordinary occurred, he was certain to become leader of the Great Zhou Army in the future, ascending to the highest precipice of power together with Shang Xingzhou, even becoming commander-in-chief for the Great Zhou Army's northern expedition against the demons.

However, when victory was right before his eyes, he died.

He died miserably, burned to death by the true flames of the Heavenly Phoenix. Moreover, he did not die immediately, but instead burned for a very long time before finally ceasing to breathe.

Before his death, he experienced the most painful torture in all the human world.

Because this was the Tianhai Divine Empress's vengeance.

Before she left this world, she had taken vengeance for herself.

Simultaneously, she had also taken vengeance for those deceased

and loyal subordinates of hers.

With a brush of her sleeve, she transformed Divine General Tian Chui's corpse into a flame, conferring upon him the glory of returning with her to the sea of stars.

Then, she went tens of thousands of li away, once more obscuring the starry sky. Stepping into the stream, she slapped a palm down upon the monk.

A boundless amount of starlight fell together with her palm. Although not heavy, it was incomparably profound and impossible to avoid.

The monk flipped his palm and brought it up to meet hers. A howl came from the solitary mountain in the thick fog behind the stream, melding together with the whistling of their palms.

The two palms met and the monk understood her intentions, asking, "Are you not even leaving behind a single seed?"

"We have a successor," the Tianhai Divine Empress replied.

The monk believed that she was speaking of Xu Yourong.

In truth, she was not, or not just her.

"My lady is truly an extraordinary person."

The monk gazed at the Tianhai Divine Empress, blood beginning to flow from his eyes.

This was the first time he had shown reverence to the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Then, his body suddenly vanished, transformed into countless shards of light that vanished back into the Cloud Grave.

An incalculable distance away, in the other world, in a desert where the sand glistened like jade sat a massive sacrificial altar.

The monk sat upon the sacrificial altar, his legs crossed.

Tens of thousands of believers were kneeling in the desert around the sacrificial altar, all their hands raised towards the heavens. Their piety was like an intoxication, an obsession, a madness, an insanity.

Suddenly, a mental energy from another continent enveloped this entire world and pressed down towards the ground.

The monk opened his eyes. His pupils were a deep black. Two streams of blood began to seep out of the corners of his eyes, and then his entire body began to bleed.

Ten-odd priests around the sacrificial altar exploded. The

believers cried out in shock and began to wail.

Countless people had died. The desert was stained red.

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In the final moment of her life, the Tianhai Divine Empress did not act as many had imagined, converting her final bits of life into a crazed energy and slaying those people she did not like.

The Pope had put down his Green Leaf, but she did not strike.

Han Qing had given up on all resistance, but she did not strike.

The manor of the Tianhai clan was silent, but she did not strike.

Her spear destroyed the Lingyan Pavilion, a brush of her sleeve burned Chen Guansong to death, and then she burned the last of her life to utterly defeat the monk.

Because the monk came from the Sacred Light Continent.

Only after many years, when the people of this world began to communicate with the other race on the Sacred Light Continent, did people finally understand what it meant on that early autumn

night when the Divine Empress defeated the projection of that monk from the Sacred Light Continent, and just how much time it had won for the people of this world.

Of course, the Tianhai Divine Empress was not a good person in the common sense of the word, let alone some virtuous ruler.

She had made this sort of choice in her final moments because, in these past few years, she had been preparing to carry out precisely this task.

Although this world had already betrayed her, she still persisted in the belief that this was her world.

This is Our world.

Since it is Our world, it naturally falls upon Us to protect it.

Any who is bold enough to extend a hand towards Our world will have it cut off.

She thought this way, so she acted this way, and so she did it.

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It was done.

It was finished.

The Tianhai Divine Empress returned to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

After finishing the inspection of her world, she finally had the leisure to glance at her side.

Chen Changsheng was by her side.

Since quite some time ago, the Chen Changsheng that had been forgotten by the entire world had always been by her side.

Perhaps out of empathy for a fellow sufferer, she had never forgotten that he was by her side.

From the time Divine General Han Qing had cast his traitorous spear, to their conversation, to her final inspection of her world, an extremely short amount of time had passed.

Moreover, Chen Changsheng's body was somewhat stiff, so he still maintained his posture from that moment.

His left knee was slightly bent, his left hand gripping the Vault Sheath, and his right hand holding the Stainless Sword.

No person noticed this sight.

At the very beginning, when the Frost God Spear had arrived at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, he had taken this posture.

At that moment, not the body, Dao, or soul of the Tianhai Divine Empress was present. No one was there to protect her.

The Frost God Spear had come.

He did not even think about those so-called factions, how they were not mother and son, and all those other problems. He instinctively gripped his sword, wanting to block this spear for her.

He had not recovered from his injuries and his body was extremely weak, but he had several thousand famous swords in his sheath and the string of stone pearls.

However, this was the Frost God Spear.

This was the divine spear of Han Qing.

Before he had time to make the slightest response, the spear pierced the Tianhai Divine Empress's body like a thunderbolt.

He could only watch as this scene occurred, unable to do a thing.

His sword could not arrive, only his intentions.

"You wanted to save Us?"

The Tianhai Divine Empress slightly arched her brows.

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say.

"All by yourself?" the Tianhai Divine Empress mocked.

Right after, the black Phoenix wings vanished in the breeze.

Suddenly, the mocking smile on her face faded into nothing and she collapsed backwards.

Chen Changsheng rushed forward and held her to his chest.

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed up at the vast sky of stars, a vexed expression appearing on her face as if they were too dazzling.

He curled around her, blocking out the starlight behind him.

Just like their first meeting those several years ago.

Back then, in the Imperial Palace, by the pool, when that squirrel was running past, he had embraced her and curled his body around

her, blocking that flower pot that did not fall behind his back.

Rain began to fall once more from the night sky, a soft pitter-patter upon the ground.

The bright and uncountable stars were high above.

On the distant horizon, extremely faint rays of light could be seen, but the peak of the Mausoleum of Books was dark beyond compare.

The endless night was finally on the verge of passing, the dawn fast approaching.

Chen Changsheng could sense the Qi at the base of the Mausoleum of Books and knew that his master had already arrived.

"I'll take you away," he said to her.

"And where will you take Us? The Garden of Zhou?" she sneered at him.

Only then did Chen Changsheng realize that the Empress had always known everything.

"We will certainly not go to that ghostly place where not even the sun can be seen."

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed east to that smear of morning light and indifferently said, "This place is quite fine."

Chapter 666 – Dawn

It was darkest before dawn. When these words were usually spoken, the meaning often desired was that as long as one was able to endure this darkest hour, one would be able to welcome a bright and beautiful morning, the principle being that hope was forever. However, when dawn truly came, just what did it have to do with that darkest hour?

Time was life and once it went, there was no turning back. There had never been any connection between another person's light and one's own darkness.

"I always believed that I was the sun." The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed towards that extremely faint light in the east, the morning sun that was still unable to ascend over the horizon. "I wanted to gloriously shine over the world. All who opposed me would inevitably be scorched to death under the rays of the sun, unable to hide."

Her words and thoughts were still as formidably tyrannical as in the past, but now, she was not standing on the Dew Platform or the edge of the Divine Path, looking over her world. Right now, she was lying in Chen Changsheng's chest, just like an ordinary woman, somewhat gentle and without much strength.

Chen Changsheng felt it the clearest. Upon hearing these words, he felt an indescribable sadness. He asked, "How is it possible to kill everyone?"

Yesterday in the Imperial Palace, Xu Yourong had given a similar stance. At the time, the Divine Empress's response had been very simple, very firm. Now, however, she did not give a similar reply.

Because all that had occurred on this endless night was proof that her answer back then had been wrong.

After a moment of silence, she replied, "Yes, it is impossible to kill everyone."

These words were said very lightly without any sort of taste, yet when Chen Changsheng heard them, he was overcome with anguish, an unbearable sourness.

He wanted to say something to comfort her on the verge of death, yet he didn't know what to say. Suddenly, a burst of noise could be heard from the forest bordering the Divine Path.

Holding the Tianhai Divine Empress, he looked over, his right hand once more gripping his sword, and his expression wary. The forests at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books were extremely dense and covered in thorny shrubs. There had never been a path and with the drenching of the downpour, it was all night intractable mud. Coupled with the restrictions on the mausoleum, just who could come here?

With the crushing of shrubs and splashing of mud, Yu Ren climbed out of the forest.

Throughout the latter half of the night, he had been arduously climbing up the Mausoleum of Books. His hand and body were covered in wounds, blood mixed with water and mud, all making for a wretched sight.

Upon arriving at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, the first thing Yu Ren saw was a beautiful woman in Chen Changsheng's embrace. For some reason, he found this woman very dangerous. His mouth agape and his face brimming with apprehension, he grunted loudly as he rushed over, wanting to pull Chen Changsheng away and behind him.

Yet when he limped over to Chen Changsheng, he stopped.

He felt this beautiful woman to be somewhat familiar. Moreover, her face was pale and, just like him, she was also covered in blood, a very pathetic sight.

Yu Ren's medical skills were brilliant and his heart kind. In Xining Village and in those two years spent traveling the world, he would often treat those too poor to afford medical treatment. After confirming that there was nothing wrong with his junior brother, he subconsciously wanted to treat the woman. Immediately afterwards, he realized that the woman was already beyond saving.

Just what was going on? Just what had happened?

When Yu Ren clambered out of the shrubs, his body covered in blood, Chen Changsheng was very shocked. He had not imagined that his senior brother had been in the Mausoleum of Books the

entire time. Then, he became deeply moved, because he knew that his senior brother had undoubtedly heard his voice and had come to his rescue. Afterwards, he felt very guilty. For no reason at all, he just felt very guilty.

The Tianhai Divine Empress gazed at the lame and half-blind young Daoist, slightly raising her brow, perhaps out of happiness, alarm, or some other emotion.

"This...is your senior brother."

"Yes." Chen Changsheng turned to Yu Ren and said, "Senior, this is your mother."

Yu Ren froze, staring at the beautiful woman lying in Chen Changsheng's embrace with his mouth agape. He didn't know what to say, or perhaps it was because he had never been able to speak in the first place.

The Tianhai Divine Empress looked at Chen Changsheng and asked, "Then, just who are you?"

"I don't know." With a hint of frustration, Chen Changsheng continued, "I originally thought that I was my lady's son, but that turned out to not be the case."

The Tianhai Divine Empress asked, "Is being my son very shameful?"

Chen Changsheng pondered this, then answered, "If I could be my lady's son, then it should be something to be very proud of, I think?"

"One slow-witted, one a fool, truly..."

The Tianhai Divine Empress glanced at Chen Changsheng and then at Yu Ren.

Finally, she glanced at the endless brilliance that spread across the night sky. "But in the end, We have two sons."

When she spoke, her mood was very tranquil and calm, and also rich with derision. In brief, it was extremely complex.

After saying this, she spoke no more.

After looking at Chen Changsheng, Yu Ren, and the starry sky, she looked at nothing else, not even this world.

She closed her eyes.

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Chen Changsheng sensed that she was no longer breathing,

sensed that her soul had departed. His face became abnormally pale as if he, too, had lost his soul.

After some time had passed, he turned his head with great difficulty to look at Yu Ren. "She...is the Divine Empress...Senior... your mother."

Stammering and stuttering, he had never found it so hard to speak in his entire life.

Right after he finished, he began to cry.

He embraced the corpse of the Tianhai Divine Empress and wept. "Senior, I'm sorry, I also don't know what's going on."

Yu Ren also began to cry, constantly gesturing back to indicate his apology.

Chen Changsheng incessantly cried, constantly repeating the word 'sorry'.

Yu Ren incessantly cried, gesturing 'sorry'.

Chen Changsheng did not know why he was saying 'sorry' to his senior brother.

Yu Ren also did not know why he was saying 'sorry' to his junior brother.

If carefully analyzed, there was naturally a reason for such sorrowful apologies. It was just that at this time, the reason could not clearly be understood.

Perhaps it was because this world had let them down and there was no place where they could find this reason.

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The rain had long since stopped.

Whether it was the torrential downpour or the drizzle sent down as a response from the world, it had all stopped.

The sun had not completely risen over the horizon, but the sea of clouds had already begun to shine.

Soon, dawn would break in the east.

The Pope, without suppressing his injuries, returned to the Li Palace.

Wuqiong Bi, carrying her husband who was teetering on the abyss of death, left the capital.

Shang Xingzhou came from Luoyang to the Mausoleum of Books.

Many ministers of the Great Zhou Imperial Court, the troops of the Imperial Guard and the City Gate Department, and the factions of the Orthodoxy all came to the Mausoleum of Books.

The lotus sea had already dissipated, but now a sea of people came like a tide to encircle the Mausoleum of Books.

Tianhai Chenwu brought those subordinates loyal to him and came to the base of the Divine Path. His expression was very indifferent, with no hint of mourning upon his countenance.

Xu Shiji, who had not appeared for the entire night, also arrived. His face was expressionless, his thoughts inscrutable.

The so-called familial love was all fake. The so-called loyalty was also occasionally fake.

The heavens had to be understood day by day. The earth also had to be understood day by day. Just how many mornings could the people or things of the world endure?

Shang Xingzhou ascended to the peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

Han Qing yielded the path.

Shang Xingzhou stepped upon the Divine Path, his Daoist robe drifting in the breeze. He seemed detached from the mundane world.

Chen Changsheng watched as his master gradually ascended the Divine Path, sensing his intentions.

He placed the body of the Tianhai Divine Empress on his back and began walking down the Mausoleum of Books.

In this entire process, Yu Ren's gaze was fixed on him and the Tianhai Divine Empress's body.

There was only one path on the Mausoleum of Books.

Shang Xingzhou ascended to the peak upon the Divine Path.

Chen Changsheng carried the Divine Empress's body as he descended the peak.

Master and disciple met in the middle of the Divine Path.

Shang Xingzhou did not look at him.

He also did not look at Shang Xingzhou.

Master and disciple brushed past each other, utter strangers.

After a long time, Chen Changsheng vanished into the forest below the Mausoleum of Books.

Shang Xingzhou reached the summit of the Mausoleum of Books. Lovingly and with dignity, he rubbed Yu Ren's head, then he took Yu Ren's good hand.

He brought Yu Ren to the edge of the Divine Path.

At the highest place in the world, he raised Yu Ren's hand.

The princes of the Chen clan, the representatives of the sects and noble clans, the countless officials of the Great Zhou, priests of the Li Palace, and soldiers prostrated on the ground, all proclaiming 'long live'.

The morning sun rose, shining upon the summit of the Mausoleum of Books.

The morning light fell upon that monolith.

This was the highest monolith of the Mausoleum of Books.

There were no words on its surface, no lines, no patterns.

Originally, there had been nothing at all.

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Book 5 – The Yellow Blooms of the Battlefield

Man ages easily while the heavens do not,

The Double Ninth comes year after year,

And the Double Ninth has come again this year,

The yellow blooms of the battlefield particularly fragrant.

The autumn wind blows fierce each year,

Unlike the spring sunshine.

Surpassing the spring sunshine,

The frosty river and sky vast as the universe.

—Double Ninth, Mao Zedong, 1929

Chapter 667 – A Cleaning Rag

Three days later, the capital had already returned to peace.

The Imperial Palace was heavily guarded by the Imperial Guard, their expressions as cold and resolute as ever. Only the most careful of observers might be able to notice the exhaustion and slight frustration on the faces of these soldiers. Under strict orders, the soldiers of the City Gate Department constantly patrolled the markets of the city, arresting many traitors who wished to take advantage of the chaos to rebel, so there was no problem with regards to safety and security.

The populace began to once more busy themselves with their lives. In their leisure, they no longer favored going to tea houses to discuss politics while secretly cursing the Demon Empress for her mismanagement of the country. Instead, they returned home early and locked the doors to their courtyards, treating all the storms outside their little courtyards as having nothing to do with them. The people of the capital had seen far too much, heard far too many stories. Without even mentioning the coup of the Hundred Herb Garden, in that bloody incident of the Orthodox Academy in the capital twenty years ago, many people had personally witnessed even more gruesome scenes. Whether it was a coup, rebellion, an extermination of evil ministers at the emperor's side, or the advent of a new era, they had experienced far too much. Thus, these matters had absolutely nothing to do with them, and they would silently wait for the initial crises to dissipate.

The weather over these past few days had also been particularly good. In the clear and refreshing autumn atmosphere, the bright sun hanging over a clear sky and the gentle rustling of fallen

leaves, it was like nothing had happened at all. But there were no pedestrians on the street and the quiet capital could not be described as serene, only with a deathly stillness. Ultimately, a lot had changed.

On the morning of the Tianhai Empress's death, a young Daoist, accompanied by Shang Xingzhou, the previous Principal of the Orthodox Academy, the princes of the Chen clan, and countless ministers, proceeded from the Mausoleum of Books into the Imperial Palace. Then, in the Imperial Court, he once more received the obeisance of the ministers and formally ascended to the throne.

It was said that this young Daoist was precisely the Crown Prince Zhaoming who had escaped from the palace many years ago.

The first thing the new monarch did upon ascending to the throne was to issue an edict. This edict had many words and was very complex. Not even the officials of the Ministry of Rites could remember all the details, but even the clumsiest fool could understand the basic intentions of this proclamation: everything the Tianhai Divine Empress had done in the past few years had been wrong. Everyone she punished had been innocent. Following this were rewards and naturally punishments as well.

All those rewarded were officials of the Imperial Court. In any case, all those ministers loyal to the Tianhai Divine Empress had been imprisoned. Divine Generals were also honored, as those Divine Generals loyal to the Tianhai Divine Empress were either dead, heavily injured, or had changed sides. Punishments were much simpler: just the word 'kill'.

It was said that autumn winds and autumn rains were excellent for killing people. In this clear and cold autumn of the past few days, there were no bleak winds and no miserable rains, but many people had still died.

After all the people that should be killed and had to be killed were killed off, many people began to cast their gazes to a certain place. Logically speaking, everyone's gazes should have been falling upon the Imperial Palace and the Li Palace, but everyone just could not help but look towards that place, all carrying different sorts of feelings.

The aforementioned place was the Orthodox Academy.

Very few people knew that on the morning of that day, Chen Changsheng had carried the body of the Tianhai Divine Empress and returned to the Orthodox Academy. From that moment onwards, the gate of the Orthodox Academy never opened again. Even the fruits and vegetables that Clear Lake Restaurant had risked sending over were not brought in, because the academy gate never once opened, and also because the Orthodox Academy had already been surrounded.

Two thousand black-armored horsemen tightly surrounded the Orthodox Academy and both Hundred Flowers Lane and the Hundred Herb Garden were filled with cultivators. Very few people knew that the first thing the new sovereign did upon ascending to the throne was not to issue an edict to the world, but to send out a decree ordering the Orthodox Academy to be put under watch, forbidding anyone from entering or exiting. Any

violators would be executed.

A somewhat subtle detail was that the people in charge of guarding the Orthodox Academy were Tianhai Shengxue and the Prince of He County.

The Prince of He County was the Prince of Xiang's younger brother from the same mother and the two had always shared a close relationship. In the past, he had even once given vent to the Prince of Xiang's anger and executed an official dispatched by the Imperial Palace. Tianhai Shengxue was the most outstanding descendant of the Tianhai clan and had an old grudge with the Orthodox Academy, although it already seemed to be resolved. Crucially, why had the Imperial Palace sent the two of them to handle this matter together? The Tianhai Empress was already dead, so did the complicated relationship between the Tianhai clan and the Chen clan have to continue?

Those who knew the actual story all maintained their silence. The gazes they aimed at the Orthodox Academy were very complex, because the Tianhai Divine Empress's body was within. Those who did not know the story held private discussions in their estates, and the gazes they aimed at the Orthodox Academy were all brimming with either ridicule, sympathy, or joy at the suffering of others.

That night three days ago had truly been very long. It had begun when Chen Changsheng left the Orthodox Academy and beat Zhou Tong half to death in the crabapple courtyard within the alley of the Northern Military Department. Afterwards, he had been sent back to the Orthodox Academy by the Orthodoxy, then brought to

the peak of the Mausoleum of Books by the Divine Empress. Just when everyone believed the Divine Empress would kill him, the Divine Empress, for some inexplicable reason, let him go. Afterwards, all the experts of the world had gathered in the capital and the Divine Empress's soul ultimately returned to the sea of stars...in one night, far too many world-shaking events had occurred, and so some relatively unimportant events and details were naturally easy to forget. However, the entire world could never forget Shang Xingzhou's words.

Chen Changsheng...was not Crown Prince Zhaoming. He was not the Divine Empress's son. He was just a pretense used to safeguard His Majesty's life, bait to weaken the Divine Empress. Now, the Divine Empress was dead, and His Majesty had succeeded in inheriting the imperial throne, so what more use did he have? Without his backing or identity, what use did Chen Changsheng's incredible talent in cultivation have? Anyone would admit that when attempting to kill Zhou Tong, he had displayed an extremely rarely seen ability and bravery, but...if nothing out of the ordinary occurred, Lord Zhou Tong, who had played the most critical role in this rebellion, was assured an even more important role in the new structure of the Imperial Court. When that time came, where would Chen Changsheng be able to go?

When those powerful figures thought of the black-armored cavalry surrounding the Orthodox Academy, they believed that in a short while, a new, more precise decree would be passed down and Chen Changsheng would lose everything he once possessed. Principal of the Orthodox Academy? The successor to the Pope? All of it was just the river of stars reflected in the Luo River. In the end, none of it had been real.

Watching the tightly shut gate of the Orthodox Academy, Tianhai Shengxue thought of the mocking smile on his father's lips over the past two nights, thought of the look of joy on the faces of Tianhai Ya'er's family. Two abnormal patches of red appeared on Tianhai Shengxue's pale face as he said, "Throwing him away as soon as matters are concluded, isn't this truly just treating him like a cleaning rag?"

The Prince of He County knew that he was speaking of Chen Changsheng and jeered, "Who knows whose bastard he is, but just because his luck was good, he was picked by the esteemed Principal Shang to serve as His Majesty's body double, stirring up so many storms after entering the capital. But, in the end, a chess piece is still a chess piece. Could he still possibly think of holding onto those things he has no right to hold?"

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Chapter 668 – A Eunuch

Whether it was the princes of the Chen clan or those major figures who took great risks in betraying the Tianhai Divine Empress, they should have been very thankful to Chen Changsheng. If not for Chen Changsheng, the Tianhai Divine Empress would not have weakened herself to change his fate. That being the case, no matter how perfect the plans Shang Xingzhou and the rest of them made, it would have been impossible to invite the Tianhai Divine Empress off her sacred altar.

Intentionally or unintentionally, Chen Changsheng had been a deciding factor in their plans, but they would not remember this, intentionally or unintentionally.

The words of the Prince of He County represented the entire world's stance towards Chen Changsheng.

Tianhai Shengxue was well aware of this. He sneered, "If he wasn't a descendant of your Chen clan, would the Divine Empress have made the mistake? A bastard? Your Highness, these words are truly too laughable."

The Prince of He County was somewhat startled at these words. His face quickly turned unsightly as he realized that this might be true.

Just then, the cavalry parted like a tide. An extremely old eunuch seated in a cushioned carriage came through.

Seeing the old eunuch, the Prince of He County raised his brows slightly. Turning to Tianhai Shengxue, he mocked, "It seems that His Majesty does not think as you do."

This old eunuch came to pass down an imperial decree.

However, even after the official announced their purpose in coming, the Orthodox Academy's gate still remained tightly shut, slow to be opened.

"It seems that His Majesty has sent people to surround the Orthodox Academy, but thinking about it in another way, isn't it that the Orthodox Academy isn't willing to open its doors?"

Tianhai Shengxue smiled, making no attempts to conceal his happiness.

"Worthy nephew, don't get happy too early..."

The Prince of He County sneered, "They say that Chen Changsheng was schoolmates with His Majesty, but if he offends this eunuch, I'm afraid no friendship will be of any use."

Tianhai Shengxue's expression turned slightly gloomy as he replied, "Your Highness, I don't understand your words."

The Prince of He County gave a grim smile. "Eunuch Lin was Imperial Father's foster brother and volunteered to enter the palace to attend to Imperial Father. As he was highly principled

and deeply revered, even after Imperial Mother took the throne and found him displeasing, she could only have him retire and return to Zhang Province to convalesce. Now, he has been invited back by Principal Shang to take on the position of Eunuch of the Seal. I truly wish to see just who would dare show him disrespect."

The elderly eunuch had been lying on the cushioned carriage this entire time, his eyes closed as he napped. Tianhai Shengxue had earlier found it rather strange. Since this eunuch had come to deliver a decree and had even seen the tense atmosphere around the Orthodox Academy, how could he possibly display such behavior? Now that he knew that it was actually that extraordinary Eunuch Lin of the past who had returned, he instantly thought that this was indeed how Eunuch Lin should be acting. His gaze now contained some curiosity and respect from gazing at such a legendary figure. However, he soon after realized that just yesterday, those eunuchs and palace maids in the Imperial Palace loyal to the Divine Empress...including the chief eunuch he had grown close to as a child, had all died. Those deaths were presumably the work of this Eunuch Lin. With this thought, his face turned somewhat pale.

After quite some time, the elderly eunuch slowly opened his eyes. Seeing that the gate to the Orthodox Academy was still shut, he expressionlessly declared, "If it doesn't open, break it."

When this old eunuch's eyes were closed, he looked like a very ordinary person, but when they opened, he seemed to naturally exude a swift and forceful grandeur, like an old spear casting off an old cloth. Wherever his gaze wandered or his words fell, a sharpness would appear.

Growing up in the Imperial Palace, he had cultivated in countless profound and secret methods, so Eunuch Lin naturally possessed an extremely high level of cultivation. However, this swift and forceful grandeur of a spear did not originate from his strength. The sharpness that filled the atmosphere came from his heart and from his eyes through which his heart was expressed. Those two eyes muddled by the passing of time were filled with resolve and righteousness, not stained in the slightest by indecision or lack of confidence.

For Shang Xingzhou to invite Eunuch Lin to return to the Imperial Palace and take up the seal represented a changing of a dynasty, the advent of a new era.

He had come from the Imperial Palace, an imperial decree in hand. His words represented the will of the Great Zhou Imperial Court, so just who would dare defy him now?

Yet after he spoke, the Orthodox Academy remained quiet. No person walked up to break the door, not a single person.

Not the black-armored heavy cavalry, the troops of the City Gate Department, or even the attendants who had escorted Eunuch Lin. They all remained at their original positions.

Many people, intentionally or unintentionally, looked to Tianhai Shengxue.

Two years ago, on a rainy spring morning, this proud son of the Tianhai clan returned from Snowhold Pass and brought the

soldiers of his family to destroy the gate of the Orthodox Academy.

On that day, many people in the capital died. For the first time, the Orthodox Academy displayed the strength and resources of its backers, defying all expectations to obtain the final victory. However, the Orthodox Academy did not repair the door, instead allowing the broken academy gate to remain in the winds and rains for a very long time until it almost became a new scenic spot of the capital.

It was only after a long time, when Chen Changsheng obtained first rank of the first banner in the Grand Examination, that the Tianhai clan acknowledged their wrongdoing and built for the Orthodox Academy a most magnificent gate.

This new academy gate was proof of the Orthodox Academy's strength and also the unwashable humiliation of the Tianhai clan.

From that moment onwards, everyone in the capital knew of one thing: the gate of the Orthodox Academy was not easy to break. If one wanted to break it, people would die, would be humiliated to death.

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"I've lived too long in my hometown. I actually didn't know how lively it was in the capital in these past two years."

After hearing the whispered explanation from an accompanying eunuch, Eunuch Lin turned to the distant Tianhai Shengxue and waved to call him over.

Tianhai Shengxue walked over.

Eunuch Lin quietly looked at him for a very long time. Finally, he commented, "When you were just born, I was still in the capital. Back then, I said to your father that the Tianhai clan was nothing but a group of idiots and trash, that only your mother was a decent lady, and that I hoped that she would raise a decent child. It seems to me now that my words weren't wrong."

Tianhai Shengxue knew of this matter from the past, sincerely replying, "The Lord Eunuch praises me too much."

Eunuch Lin no longer brought up these matters of old. He asked, "I hear that you were once humiliated here?"

Tianhai Shengxue looked to the tightly shut gate of the Orthodox Academy and replied, "That was just this junior seeking out humiliation for himself."

Eunuch Lin was rather surprised at this statement. With a calm gaze, he said, "In this case, you are not prepared to seek it back?"

To seek back a humiliation that one once received was not seeking humiliation but openly taking revenge. For instance, he

could destroy the Orthodox Academy again.

Tianhai Shengxue used silence to show his intentions.

Eunuch Lin smirked as he asked, "Could it be that everyone in the Tianhai clan is like you, intentions infirm?"

Tianhai Shengxue felt his body go cold at these words. It must be known that the current situation was very sensitive and tense. With just the words 'intentions infirm', the Tianhai clan might attract a great trouble. However, his intentions were firm enough, allowing him to reject Eunuch Lin's clearly very generous proposal. At this time, why would he regret it?

"Lord Eunuch earlier said that my mother was decent and that I was also a decent child, so in my view, I have to show some reason."

Tianhai Shengxue took a deep breath, and his words became as frigid and sharp as ice. "Moreover, Lord Eunuch's earlier words were not appropriate. Principal Chen has accomplished great merit for the human race and is also the future Pope. Let alone an imperial decree, even if His Majesty personally came, he presumably would not act too firmly, and he would certainly not destroy the academy gate."

"Is that so?" Eunuch Lin suddenly began to laugh.

In the next moment, the laughter vanished and the look on his

face became even colder than Tianhai Shengxue's, becoming extremely unyielding. Cupping his fist and raising it to the sky, he said, "Taizu's descendants have finally been able to take back the world, causing the entire world to celebrate. Now, the Orthodox Academy actually dares to refuse the decree, a truly puzzling matter. Could it be that all this is fake? To not even dare destroy an academy gate, how can they claim to rule the world?"

These words were very heavy, very frightening.

Not waiting for Tianhai Shengxue's response, the Prince of He County came to his senses. Gritting his teeth, he pulled out his whip and lashed it on the backs of his own troops, yelling, "Hurry and take apart the academy gate!"

With this order, those silent attendants and soldiers of the City Gate Department finally began to move, beginning preparations to clear the area.

Several hundred black-armored heavy cavalry were making preparations to act as vanguard, the heavy armor on the bodies of the soldiers and their warhorses gleaming with a cold light, giving off a stifling feeling of oppression.

No matter how magnificent the gate of the Orthodox Academy, no matter how durable, it would also be rendered into pieces by the weapons of the black-armored heavy cavalry.

At that time, just what sort of end would the people within the Orthodox Academy face?

Chapter 669 – An Academy

The gate to the Orthodox Academy had been tightly shut this entire time, not a single noise emerging from within. Even when the troops of the Imperial Court encircled it or the old eunuch came bearing an imperial decree, nothing changed. It remained a still and quiet place. Anyone would think that there was nobody behind this thick academy gate.

In reality, there had always been people behind the gate of the Orthodox Academy.

Behind the academy gate, two yellow poplar trees had been planted. With the coming of autumn, the leaves on these two trees had been greatly reduced. The clear and cold light from the sun passed through the branches and fell upon the face of a young girl.

This girl had a beautiful and elegant appearance, still suffused with a childish air. She was still very young and under the sunlight, she seemed even more charming. However, the apprehension and exhaustion on her face also became more visible.

Ye Xiaolian, inner sect disciple of South Stream Temple.

Su Moyu stood by her side.

Several dozen South Stream Temple disciples stood behind the pair.

Their swords had long since been unsheathed.

The clear autumn sunlight could fall upon their faces, but it could not fall upon their swords, because those swords were too sharp, their glows too bright.

They had been standing guard behind the Orthodox Academy's gate this entire time.

The sword array of South Stream Temple had already guarded this place for three days and three nights.

At present, the female disciples of South Stream Temple were extremely tired. When faint voices came from beyond the walls, their expressions began to shift.

The black-armored heavy cavalry of the Great Zhou were unmatched in the world. If they charged in like this, not even the sword array of South Stream Temple would be able to resist.

"What do we do?" Ye Xiaolian turned to Su Moyu, her elegant face covered in anxiety.

Su Moyu turned his head in the direction of the library, thinking of the fellow who had remained uncommunicative ever since he returned from the Mausoleum of Books, who still had not made a decision.

"That's Eunuch Lin! What are all of you still thinking about! Just

open the academy gate and receive the decree."

A student of the Orthodox Academy looked at the people in front of the academy gate, his face a picture of fright as he yelled, "Don't tell me you're really preparing to defy the decree! I'm certainly not going to accompany you all in death!"

Hearing this person's words, the crowd of teachers and students grew somewhat restless. Conversations could be heard, and someone even got into an intense quarrel.

Su Moyu looked at the student and recalled that he was the son of some wealthy merchant on Henan Road. He silently noted down the student's name in his memory.

Ye Xiaolian watched where he was looking and thought that he was beginning to waver. She turned to the teachers and students, and yelled, "The Holy Maiden made a decree that the South Stream Temple disciples must ensure the safety of Principal Chen! If the craven and cowardly are present, then leave from the back gate. Cease babbling nonsense, or don't blame the temple's sword for being merciless!"

The merchant's son from Henan Road instantly changed expression upon hearing this threat. He was very angry but did not dare to say anything more, walking out from the crowd.

Soon after, ten-odd Orthodox Academy students and several lecturers left the crowd, all making their way to the back gate.

Seeing this sight, those remaining couldn't help but shout abuse. After seeing the gazes of the female disciples of the South Stream Temple, they felt thoroughly ashamed and only increased their abuse.

Su Moyu said nothing, only silently noted down the names of the people that had left in his mind.

At this point, Ye Xiaolian realized that his silence did not mean that he was wavering. Somewhat puzzled, she asked, "What are you thinking?"

Su Moyu calmly explained, "I was thinking, if the Orthodox Academy is able to be preserved, just what sort of method I should use to get back at those people."

Ye Xiaolian was a little taken aback, thinking to herself, when did that Su Moyu of the Li Palace Academy famed for maintaining courtesy and keeping aloof change personality?

She did not say it, but Su Moyu knew what she was thinking. He looked at the beautiful autumn scenery of the Orthodox Academy, a look of nostalgia on his face. "This is an interesting place. Anyone who stays here for too long will change somewhat."

If this interesting Orthodox Academy could be preserved, that would naturally be excellent. But 'if' had always been the most unreliable of words.

Or else why was he already beginning to feel sorrow, beginning to reminisce?

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Hundred Flowers Lane had already been cleared. The buildings across the lane had even been pushed over, leaving only the tea house.

In the gradually rising dust, this tea house that had watched dozens of exhibition matches seemed very lonely. On the other hand, the figures of the several hundred black-armored heavy cavalry were just as frightening.

The Orthodox Academy's gate was still tightly shut.

"To actually be so bold, truly worthy of the Orthodox Academy built up by Principal Shang, worthy of His Majesty's junior brother."

Eunuch Lin suddenly began to laugh, his smile filled with emotion.

The elderly man's voice was somewhat muddled, somewhat soft. Other than those young attendants close to him, no one else could hear it.

However, his following sentence could be heard by everyone present.

Eunuch Lin gazed at the tightly shut gate of the Orthodox Academy, his smile fading as he slowly spoke, "Principal Chen is a solitary man, but the professors and students in the Orthodox Academy...they have families."

With this statement, a noise finally came from the Orthodox Academy, an unrest similarly stirring on the street.

Countless gazes turned to the elderly Eunuch of the Seal.

Tianhai Shengxue's complexion paled even more.

He had absolutely not expected that Eunuch Lin was completely at odds with his honest and unswerving reputation, actually using such unyielding and despicable methods!

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They did not know if they had heard incorrectly.

It seemed that a voice had come from the depths of the Orthodox Academy.

Then, the front gate of the Orthodox Academy that had remained shut for three days and nights finally began to slowly open.

A cold and forceful sword glow assailed those outside, and two-hundred-odd teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy emerged.

They were clearly no match, yet they still maintained the tight array and waited.

At this sight, both the Prince of He County and the black-armored cavalry subtly reacted.

Eunuch Lin was very calm. He even seemed to give the impression that he was rather pleased at this display.

Su Moyu had not slept these past three days and was exhausted, but his eyes and voice were both clear.

Standing on the stone steps, he looked at Eunuch Lin and said, "Only one person is needed to proclaim a decree."

An imperial decree had come, but the Orthodox Academy had not opened wide its gate, laid out incense and prostrated themselves on the ground. Instead, they had even gone so far as to permit only Eunuch Lin to enter. This attitude was still extremely disrespectful.

Eunuch Lin was not angered. Smiling, he said, "If I need to kill him, a single decree and myself is enough."

Saying this, he walked into the Orthodox Academy. As he brushed past Su Moyu, he lightly patted him on the shoulder.

Ye Xiaolian's expression suddenly turned cold, the hand gripping her sword slightly tightening.

Nothing had happened.

Su Moyu did not vomit blood and fall dead to the floor.

Eunuch Lin only wished to convey to Su Moyu the admiration and regard he felt for him.

In this major undertaking, Wuqiong Bi and Bie Yanghong, these two experts of the Divine Domain, especially the latter, had performed an extraordinary service.

Su Moyu was Bie Yanghong's nephew, yet he remained in the Orthodox Academy after the event and did not leave. In the eyes of the common people, this was very foolish, but to Eunuch Lin, who had acted the fool his entire life, this was truly outstanding.

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The door to the library was open. The sunlight fell upon the glossy black floorboards, which were so shiny that one could see one's own reflection in them.

Chen Changsheng sat by the window. He was not looking out the window at the autumn sights. His head was lowered and he seemed to be thinking of something.

Eunuch Lin quietly gazed at him, gazed at him for a very long time.

Chen Changsheng did not move, did not speak. His head remained lowered.

Eunuch Lin suddenly understood that he was looking at his reflection in the floorboards.

Chen Changsheng was looking at himself.

Chapter 670 – A Decree

The clear light of the autumn day shone both inside and outside the library. It was very peaceful.

Suddenly, a voice spoke. This voice was very old, calm and unperturbed. It was a graceful voice, leisurely and unoppressive, a voice that inspired trust.

Eunuch Lin said, "I know what you are thinking. You think that His Majesty has been compelled by us treacherous officials, thus requiring three days to send out this decree, for the Orthodox Academy to be surrounded, forbidding anyone from leaving. But you are wrong. This is truly a decree personally drafted by His Majesty, because...he wishes to protect you."

As he spoke, he never took his eyes off the youth by the window, as if he was trying to see through him. Yet this youth displayed no reaction. No matter what he heard, he kept his head lowered in silence. How could there be no response? It could be gratitude, disbelief, ridicule, or anger, or some other emotion, but upon hearing these words, shouldn't there have been some emotional change?

The library remained quiet. Perhaps it was precisely because of this silence that Eunuch Lin said nothing, did not read out the decree, and instead allowed the silence to persist.

After quite some time, the youth finally raised his head, looking out the window at the cool and refreshing autumn scenes.

Three days had passed since the momentous battle upon the Mausoleum of Books, but his face was still very pale and he had clearly gotten much thinner. His expression, however, was still very calm.

There was no sorrow or anger on his face, no frustration or helplessness, only calm.

Because of the pensive look on his face, his clear and young features seemed even more composed. He was not, as once assessed by the common people, an old-fashioned youth, but had truly matured.

In a single night, he had experienced so many things, overcome death, seen many ugly or magnificent sights. Anyone would mature after all this, right?

As he thought of these things, the gaze Eunuch Lin aimed at the youth was unexpectedly tinged with pity.

The bright yellow imperial decree had already been taken from his sleeve. He did not open it, instead tightly holding it like a spear in his hands.

"You know why I have come to the Orthodox Academy today." After a very long pause, Eunuch Lin continued, "I am here to take the Empress's body away."

The library was still quiet. The autumn breeze blew in through the window and freely traveled amidst the bookshelves and floorboards.

"And then?" Chen Changsheng asked.

In these three days and nights, he had not eaten, had not drunk, and had not opened his mouth, until now.

He spoke very slowly and his voice was very hoarse, just like sands that had been baked under the autumn sun for three days.

"You finally spoke."

Eunuch Lin gazed at him, his voice containing many emotions.

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "I spoke earlier. If I didn't speak, how would you have been able to come in?"

As he spoke, he kept looking out the window, at the yellowing lawn, the chilled autumn waters of the lake, and the great banyan tree by the lake. His voice was very calm as if devoid of emotion. His expression was very serious without the slightest derision, because he was just giving a very cool-headed and objective explanation.

However, Eunuch Lin was greatly discomfited by this, and felt a weight on his chest.

This was a fact. Although meaningless, it was still a fact that it was he who had let Su Moyu open the Orthodox Academy's gate.

It had nothing to do with Eunuch Lin, nor did it have much to do with the imperial decree. He just wished to say something.

As a certain youth had said three years ago in the Plum Garden Inn, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were both people that made others speechless.

The library became silent once more, until Eunuch Lin again spoke.

"Yes, but you still spoke. Just as how not everyone is willing to die together with the Orthodox Academy," he said as he looked at Chen Changsheng.

"The Orthodox Academy is not Star Seizer Academy. The rules of the academy aren't too strict and there are no ethics that need to be adhered to. This is a place of study; what right is there to require these things?"

Chen Changsheng bore no ill will towards those teachers and students that had left the Orthodox Academy, nor did he feel any need to give this explanation to the old eunuch.

"And then?" he asked, looking out the window at the autumn scenery.

This was a repetition, a reinforcement. Importantly, this was the question he wanted an answer for.

"After we take back the Divine Empress's Phoenix body, there will naturally be a great burial, no...of course, it will be a state funeral," Eunuch Lin expressionlessly explained. "Although in my view, the Demon Empress should have her bones ground into dust and thrown into a foul sewer, she is still Emperor Xian's first wife, His Majesty's birth mother. She has the status and rank—there is no need for you to concern yourself with these problems."

Chen Changsheng still calmly looked out the window as he replied, "I've already buried her."

The library became silent once more. Nobody spoke for a very long time.

Since she was already buried, she naturally had a grave. If there was a grave, it naturally could not be unearthed. Even an imperial decree would be meaningless here.

Because this was morality, ethics, respect for the deceased.

"Since even the grave within the Garden of Zhou can be opened, there is no grave in the world that cannot be opened."

Eunuch Lin slightly narrowed his eyes as he looked at him. "Perhaps you can just tell me where her grave is."

She was buried in the depths of the Hundred Herb Garden.

Chen Changsheng thought this silently, not answering this request.

In these past years, his several meetings with the Tianhai Divine Empress had all been at the Hundred Herb Garden.

He had never asked the Divine Empress why she liked drinking tea in the Hundred Herb Garden, or just what the stone table, the metal tea pot, and the black tea and white tea meant to her.

But in the Hundred Herb Garden, she had caressed his face, seen his eyes. He had seen recollection in her eyes, and he knew that this was her most favored place, because it was here that she had experienced the most beautiful period.

Thus, he had buried her in the Hundred Herb Garden.

"Principal Chen is defying the decree?"

Eunuch Lin narrowed his eyes even harder, his sharpness revealed and his tone growing abnormally tough.

This was the first time he had addressed Chen Changsheng as principal. He spoke with great solemnity, his expression abnormally serious.

Chen Changsheng looked out the window at the autumn scenery in silence.

It was then that he realized that an autumn day without rain truthfully did not have much meaning.

Without rain to fall upon the red and yellow leaves, the dust rising from beyond the academy walls scattered the sunlight. No longer clear and attractive, it actually gave off a sticky and greasy feeling, invoking displeasure.

He was displeased at this sort of autumn day.

"Both Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke transformed into dust and light after death, returning to the sea of stars, not leaving a single vestige in the human world. The Empress's cultivation far exceeded these two Storms. If she was willing, she could have transformed her body into star dust on the point of death. However, she did not. Do you understand why this is?"

Eunuch Lin entered the library and stood upon the pitch-black and glossy floorboards.

The raised threshold of the door was right behind him.

He continued to look at Chen Changsheng and said, "Because the Empress knew that you valued feelings, that you would assuredly bring her body away, and thus left for you so many troubles."

These words of his were somewhat grave, heavy, his expression very solemn and serious.

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning and knew that the vast majority of people also thought this way, but he did not believe it.

With the type of person the Tianhai Divine Empress was, before returning to the sea of stars, why would she care about these trivial matters after her death?

It was a pity that no one would believe this.

"You contributed to the Demon Empress's death on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, and you are also His Majesty's junior brother."

Eunuch Lin's voice grew harsher and harsher. "But everyone saw her save you on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books and also saw you carry her away."

Chen Changsheng still looked out the window at the scenery, not responding to these words.

Eunuch Lin continued, "In the eyes of others, you are nothing at all. To disregard you or kill you are both very simple tasks. Even Principal Shang believes that there is no use or benefit in having you remain, but...I do not think this way. Thus, I came today to

the Orthodox Academy to issue this decree, and also to give you a chance."

Chen Changsheng blinked as if wanting to completely crush the autumn beyond the window.

Chapter 671 – A Friend

"What chance?"

"A chance for you to give up those meaningless and empty obsessions, to give no reason for anyone to kill you. Then you can remain in the Orthodox Academy, remain in the capital, and assist His Majesty."

"I don't understand."

"The Demon Empress spoke correctly on that night. Those princes are not to be trifled with and the Tianhai clan will not always act so well-behaved. Whether or not His Majesty can sit stably on the throne has always been a problem."

"Could it be that you do not trust in Teacher?"

"Principal Shang's loyalty does not require proof, but I would not mind if His Majesty could gain even more assistance."

Chen Changsheng had a rough understanding of Eunuch Lin's intentions.

Perhaps this truly was a chance for him and the Orthodox Academy, but he did not say anything.

Eunuch Lin advised, "Receive the decree, hand over Tianhai's

body, make your stance known to the entire world, and remain at His Majesty's side."

After a long period of silence, Chen Changsheng asked, "Why should I do this?"

Eunuch Lin answered, "Because His Majesty requires your help."

After an even longer silence, Chen Changsheng asked, "Why do I need to help him?"

Eunuch Lin's expression gradually chilled. "Only this way can you take up the burden of affection between schoolmates, the righteousness between lord and minister."

"The affection between schoolmates...of course there's that."

Chen Changsheng stood up and rested his right hand on the windowsill, watching as the sights outside the window gradually turned somber. He asked somewhat slowly, "But what is this righteousness between lord and minister?"

Eunuch Lin harshly said, "As a person of the Great Zhou, do you dare say that you are not willing to consider yourself a minister?"

"Even if I am willing to become a minister, when did Senior want to be a monarch?"

He shook his head, continuing, "And my senior brother knows how to treat people, but how does he know to treat the ills of a country?"

Eunuch Lin believed that he had understood something and his voice became abnormally cold. "The Demon Empress was not your mother. You are nothing but a chess piece, so it's best if you wake up a little. Don't believe just because she saved you on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books that she had some sort of deep affection for you, that you should guard her grave out of some sort of filial piety."

Chen Changsheng replied, "On the chessboard, pieces are divided into black and red. If I'm the Empress's chess piece, how could I become your side's chess piece?"

The entire world knew that he was a chess piece, or fruit, that those who opposed Tianhai had painstakingly raised for many years.

Although the Tianhai Divine Empress had not killed him or eaten him, this fruit had still succeeded in sending the poison into her body.

This was probably what was meant by fate, or the Heavenly Dao, enigmatic and impossible to defeat.

Since he was his teacher's chess piece, he was naturally not the Divine Empress's chess piece, and so thorough investigations were not required.

This was a matter he had taken these three days to understand.

"So you believe that she is a good person and feel sorrow for her departure, and thus refuse to accept the decree? Or are you saying that too many people have died in the capital in these three days, going against your principles? Don't forget, the words 'able and virtuous' or 'benevolent and righteous' have never applied to her. If she had been the one to win this time, only more people would have died in the capital."

Eunuch Lin said, looking at him with a stern expression.

"Divine Empress was not any sort of good person, that's a given. On the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, she saved me only because she wanted to save me at that moment."

Chen Changsheng moved his gaze gradually upwards, ultimately resting it upon that barely visible mausoleum in the distance. After a pause, he continued, "I'm not going to deceive myself into thinking that this act was a symbol of the love between mother and son or some other great kindness...but in the end, she saved me, and at that moment, I could sense that her kindness then was real."

During this time, he was calm yet lonely. It was a very rare sight to see these two emotions simultaneously appearing on the figure of a youth.

After a very long time, he drew back his gaze and lowered his head. "Sir should be clearly aware that I won't trust a single person

anymore."

Any person that experienced all that he had experienced would not hold any trust for this world.

"You can trust in me, just as many others have," Eunuch Lin looked at his back and said.

In Xining Village, Chen Changsheng had naturally not heard any of the rumors regarding this old eunuch, but after coming to the capital, he no longer lived such a solitary life. He had also heard the story regarding this man.

In the eyes of the common people, Eunuch Lin was a hero who most valued the ties of friendship, a most devoted scholar of the state, a gentleman who could never be bullied.

Back when Emperor Taizong was unable to decide on a successor, the Imperial Palace was an extremely dangerous place. As Emperor Xian's foster brother, he firmly decided to castrate himself and entered the palace to become a eunuch for the sake of safeguarding Emperor Xian. Afterwards, when Emperor Xian's illness worsened and the Divine Empress began to manage the empire, for the sake of the Great Zhou Dynasty and the common people, he suffered in silence by living in the palace until Emperor Xian's death.

Eunuch Lin had done many similar things throughout his life. His entire life was a legend, approaching perfection.

Today, he came with a decree to the Orthodox Academy. For the sake of the Great Zhou Dynasty, for the sake of the common people, for the sake of His Majesty, he wished to bring Chen Changsheng under control.

In order to bring Chen Changsheng under control, what Eunuch Lin had to do first was convince Chen Changsheng. In this world, there were always some things worthy of trust, and even worth struggling for.

Like the continued existence of the Great Zhou Dynasty for one thousand years, like the bright future of humanity, like the supreme glory of the Chen Imperial clan, like His Majesty's imperial throne.

The library was very quiet.

"I don't trust you."

There was no contemplation or hesitation. Chen Changsheng's answer was very direct and firm.

In his view, those things called righteous causes and loyalty had no use whatsoever.

Eunuch Lin narrowed his eyes and asked, "Why?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Because, earlier, you used our relatives to threaten us."

Eunuch Lin expressionlessly replied, "I used the lives of their relatives to open the gate of the Orthodox Academy. There was no slaughter, no death; is that not the best result?"

Chen Changsheng asked, "As long as you reach your goal, the methods you use to reach it don't matter?"

"Yes, as long as you never forget your original intentions in the process."

Eunuch Lin proudly declared, "I use my entire life as proof that I've done it."

Chen Changsheng continued no longer on this subject. He asked, "If I firmly refuse the decree, what will happen?"

"At the Li Palace, Principal Shang said to me that this academy was too small. If destroyed, it would not be too much trouble to build it again."

Eunuch Lin's voice became somewhat lofty, like that of an immortal, and also like the weeping of a ghost from the Netherworld.

"So this was your original intention."

Chen Changsheng paused, then noted, "I'm very regretful that

one of my friends left."

Eunuch Lin asked, "Even if that friend of yours were here, what could they change?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head, saying, "Of course, he wouldn't be able to change anything, but I'm not good at speaking. If he were here, perhaps he would be able to speak clearly on my behalf."

Eunuch Lin asked, "If your friend were here, what would he say?"

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a very long time, imagining what his friend would probably say if he encountered such a situation.

Afterwards, he turned and looked into Eunuch Lin's eyes.

"In these past few years, the princes of the Chen clan in the provinces and counties have acted tyrannically, devastating the common people, but have you ever said anything about it?"

"The Divine Empress used Zhou Tong, Cheng Jun and other such evil ministers and was naturally not a good person. Now, your side also uses Zhou Tong, and will use him again, so how can your side be considered good people?"

"That year, for the sake of the thrill from dying for your fabricated cause, you castrated yourself and entered the palace. Did you ever imagine what your parents might think? What His

Majesty thought?"

Eunuch Lin suddenly became stern as he shouted, "I and His Majesty..."

Not waiting for him to finish, Chen Changsheng continued, "His Majesty loved you as a brother, but you were only willing to be a minister, or a slave, making His Majesty even more lonely and grief-stricken. Just where was the affection?"

Furious, Eunuch Lin roared, "We were originally lord and minister, so naturally lord and minister..."

Chen Changsheng still did not allow him to finish, calmly and firmly continuing.

"I don't care how you regarded your relationship with Emperor Xian, but it certainly won't be the relationship I have with Senior Brother.

"Senior is not willing to consider himself a lord, so I naturally can't consider myself a minister.

"Moreover, I've always been the future Pope, not a minister."

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Eunuch Lin smiled in his fury, jeering, "You still think that you're the future Pope? Truly ridiculous to the extreme."

"If that friend of mine were still here, he would definitely say... this isn't a matter you have the right to ask about. Just what thing do you count as?"

Chen Changsheng's voice was still calm, containing no ridicule. It was like the repetition of a machine, an imitation.

Including when he spoke about 'right' and 'what thing'.

He was studying his friend's way of speaking.

When this sort of speaking style was paired with such composure, it carried a destructive power that exceeded the imagination.

It was still like those words that friend of his had said three years ago in the Plum Garden Inn.

Eunuch Lin's breathing became somewhat coarse.

At present, many people were breathing faster. Outside the Orthodox Academy, the black-armored heavy cavalry were preparing to charge. Those warhorses covered in heavy armor also began to take heavier breaths.

Soon after, perhaps because he had surpassed rage, Eunuch Lin became much calmer.

He looked at Chen Changsheng and expressionlessly said, "I regard you with importance because of your status in the Orthodoxy and the small name you have made for yourself in these three years, but not because of your person. You think that a bunch of children like you can reverse the momentum of the human world, resist the surging wave of the Heavenly Dao? No, you will just cause many people to die for your stupid decision."

Chen Changsheng asked, "And that innocent blood will never stain your hands and you will forever remain clean, right?"

Eunuch Lin proudly declared, "That is because I have righteousness at hand."

Chen Changsheng thought of how three years ago, during the Ivy Festival, those people who wanted Xu Yourong to marry Qiushan Jun for the sake of righteousness had asked him to annul his engagement with her.

He said, "I was wrong."

Eunuch Lin indifferently noted, "It's too late to recognize your error."

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "I'm saying that if my friend were here, he would not say all those words I said to you just now."

Arching his brows, Eunuch Lin asked, "Is that so?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "He would probably just say two words."

Eunuch Lin's eyes narrowed as he flatly said, "What two words."

Chen Changsheng replied, "F**k you."

Chapter 672 – A Matter

After Chen Changsheng said those two words, it was naturally impossible for the reading of the decree to continue.

Eunuch Lin calmly gazed at him, asking, "Do you think I won't dare kill you?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Three days after the new emperor took the throne, he sent someone to kill the future Pope. Such a deed will go down in history."

Eunuch Lin still calmly gazed at him, speaking in a composed voice. "You are His Majesty's cherished junior, and you also have many supporters in the Orthodoxy. Just as you said, if I really do kill you, His Majesty will be aggrieved and the capital in chaos. In order to pacify the situation, to give an explanation to history, presumably I will also be ordered to commit suicide."

Chen Changsheng replied, "But you will still kill me."

Eunuch Lin spoke with a cold expression on his face. "Because you've already made your position clear and I've sensed the danger you present. Since you're not willing to become a minister, you can only die. When His Majesty ascends to the throne, he must awe the entire world. Anyone who still feels loyalty to the Demon Empress must die, no matter who they are. As for my own conclusion, that's not important...because I am a stupidly loyal person."

"Stupidity does not mean you have the power to speak

unreasonably, nor is it something that requires respect."

Chen Changsheng turned away from the window. The clear and cold autumn sun fell on his uniform, seeming very much like starlight.

He unsheathed his sword and inserted the hilt into the sheath.

His hand was very steady, as were his breathing and voice. "My master is in the Li Palace right now?"

Eunuch Lin slightly creased his brow. He had not expected Chen Changsheng to still be able to remain so sober and calm at this moment.

"Did you ever think about why, three days ago on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, he didn't kill me, and why he's never come to visit me at the Orthodox Academy?"

Chen Changsheng looked at Eunuch Lin and continued, "Because he doesn't dare to see me, and he can't ensure that he'll be able to silently kill me."

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"He was raised by my hand. If I open my mouth and tell him to

die, he should just obediently die. This is his obligation."

In that most quiet and secluded hall of the Li Palace, a voice clear and cold like the autumn rose up.

"If this is an obligation, Senior Brother, then why don't you dare go to the Orthodox Academy and see him?"

The Pope's voice also rose up.

"Why don't I dare see him? I just don't want to visit because of his silly depression and have him say some inappropriate words to me, making me angry."

Shang Xingzhou was no longer as ordinary as he had appeared in the last twenty years. He was still wearing a Daoist robe, but nobody would take him for some ordinary middle-aged Daoist.

He had a head of black hair run through with the occasional streak of frosty white. His appearance was handsome, his skin tender and smooth as if newly born. He was calm and indifferent, so refined that it was frightening. He was even older than the Pope, but he still looked incomparably young, his body seeming to brim with an infinite amount of energy.

The Pope looked at him and calmly asked, "Is that so? Then Senior, why have you come to see me? You're not afraid that I'll say something inappropriate and make you angry?"

Shang Xingzhou replied, "I came to visit you because I wished to discuss you with the matter of the successor to my teachings."

The Pope replied, "That staff?"

Shang Xingzhou affirmed, "Correct."

The Pope had confirmed his intentions. After a pause, he questioned, "Why?"

Shang Xingzhou calmly replied, "With Tianhai dead, what use is there in leaving him around?"

The Pope slowly shook his head. "As a child, he became well-versed in the three thousand scriptures of the Dao, he possesses an absolutely exceptional talent in cultivation, and there is nothing to complain about with regards to his behavior."

Shang Xingzhou calmly looked back and said, "Junior Brother, you should know very well that the succession of the Orthodoxy has nothing to do with talent, or how would it have come to you?"

The most important consideration in the succession of the Orthodoxy was how a successor would be able to make the Orthodoxy persist for thousands of generations. Candidacy truly had nothing to do with talent, only with benefit.

Back when the Li Palace was choosing the next Pope, Shang Xingzhou, who had been slightly stronger in cultivation and who

was even better in terms of strategy and will, had withdrawn himself from the competition precisely for these reasons.

This was how it was one thousand years ago, how it was in their era, and so why would there be an exception now?

As he thought of the matters of the past, the Pope was quiet for a very long time. Suddenly, he noted, "His blood clearly comes from the descendants of the deceased."

Since he could not speak of talent or Dao heart, only of benefit, what he had in mind was this.

"Correct, I once promised that monk that as long as the great undertaking succeeded, Chen Changsheng, as a representative of the descendants of the deceased, would become the next Pope, and they would not contend for the imperial throne."

Shang Xingzhou expressionlessly continued, "But on that night, Tianhai shattered his mental projection, destroyed the path the descendants of the deceased had used several hundred years to construct. Even if they obtained the true legacy of the Sacred Light Continent, they would need at least several decades to break through the crystal barrier again. This being the case, why do I need to fulfill my promise and have that child become Pope?"

The Pope's expression did not change at these words. He indifferently asked, "Then who do you want to be Pope?"

Shang Xingzhou said nothing, only clapped his hands.

The clear clap echoed through the quiet and secluded hall.

After a moment, accompanied by extremely light footsteps, a young woman entered the hall.

On that night, this young woman had also appeared at the Mausoleum of Books.

She had a very delicate appearance, tender and charming, but there was an unconcealable air of nobility and pride on her face.

Mu Jiushi, the young and mysterious member of the Six Prefects of the Orthodoxy. Even the Tianhai Divine Empress treated her differently.

The Pope did not seem surprised at her appearance. He asked, "You're sure that you must be Pope?"

Mu Jiushi giggled and said, "I'm a very cool-headed person. I have no confidence in contending with Xu Yourong for the hearts and favor of the southerners, so I won't go to South Stream Temple to become Holy Maiden."

She laughed very freely and openly, yet her words were arrogant and tyrannical.

"But Chen Changsheng is nothing at all. Why should I let him be Pope?"

The Pope smiled at her, but said nothing.

Mu Jiushi's smile deepened, a smile that a young woman of her age should not have.

The words she spoke were even deeper, like words carved into wood, not at all words that should be said to the Pope.

"Did Your Holiness not say...that you were about to die?" She looked at the Pope and laughed. "Even if Your Holiness does not want me to be Pope, there's no means of stopping me after death. Why not do it now to be somewhat more straightforward? In the future, when I'm Pope, in memory of Your Holiness's kindness, I'll naturally leave Chen Changsheng a path of survival."

On that night on the Mausoleum of Books, the Tianhai Divine Empress had asked the Pope for a reason. The reason the Pope had given was very clear: he was old and about to die.

This should be a fact, but the way Mu Jiushi spoke had ceased to be direct and moved on to being discourteous.

Shang Xingzhou raised his hand to indicate that she should cease speaking. He then said to the Pope, "In the latter half of my life, I want to do two things. I've already accomplished one."

What he spoke of was naturally the death of the Tianhai Divine Empress.

"What I want to do second, Junior Brother also knows. It is to exterminate the demons and complete His Majesty Taizong's dying wish. You also agree with me on this, which is why you allied with me on that night. You are also keenly aware that in order to exterminate the demons, we must unite all the strength that we can unite. His Majesty Taizong completed the alliance between the humans and demi-humans, then Tianhai and you succeeded at bring the confluence of the north and south into fruition. What comes next is naturally the bringing together of east and west. Consequently, many years ago, I began grooming Mu Jiushi. When she was five, I left the position of Archbishop of the Hall of Announcements for her, so why can't she be Pope?"

The Pope wanted to say a few things.

Shang Xingzhou continued, "I know that there has never been a case where a woman has become Pope, but you were able to support Tianhai in ascending to the imperial throne of the Great Zhou, so you should also support her. Junior Brother, you must not forget, she represents all of the Great Western Continent. Archbishop of the Hall of Announcements is not enough. We have to pay much more before we can welcome an epoch where all of humanity is truly united."

The Pope was quiet for a seemingly endless amount of time. Finally, he donned the Divine Crown, put on his Divine Robe, and walked towards that wall in the deepest parts of the hall.

The stone wall gradually parted, sacred and pure light shooting out from it and shining upon Mu Jiushi's face. Her smile was so proud.

Shang Xingzhou glanced at her.

Mu Jiushi stepped forward and took hold of the Pope's arm.

The Pope stopped and glanced at her.

She returned a sweet smile, with no intention of letting go.

The Pope said nothing and continued walking towards the other side of the stone wall.

On the other side was the Great Hall of Light.

Several hundred bishops quietly waited within the hall.

Tens of thousands of priests, students, teachers, and cavalry waited outside the hall.

The Pope walked to the place where the light was at its most flourishing.

Mu Jiushi stood beside him.

At this scene, many of the important figures of the Orthodoxy, An Lin and Zhuang Zhihuan included, revealed expressions of shock.

Mao Qiuyu quietly stood at the very front, his expression unchanging.

The Pope gazed at the crowd and declared, "I have a matter to announce."

Chapter 673 – A Problem

All gazes were focused on the highest point of the Great Hall of Light.

Seeing the Pope with Mu Jiushi standing next to him, the crowd was filled with a deep unease.

Given the solemnity of the affair, the Pope's announcement naturally had to do with the coup of the Mausoleum of Books. Many people had even already thought of Chen Changsheng's name.

The mood was very tense and uneasy. Nobody noticed two people walking in from the side path into the hall.

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan, two Prefects of the Orthodoxy. On that night, they had been personally sealed by the Pope and jailed in the Dao Prison. Why had they suddenly appeared now?

In just three days, they had both greatly thinned, their faces pale and devoid of blood.

They made their way through the crowd towards the front of the great hall. Finally, people took notice of their presence and gasped.

Gradually, the cries of alarm increased.

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan once more stood at the very front of the Great Hall of Light.

Archbishop An Lin revealed a look of shock while Zhuang Zhihuan's eyes slightly narrowed. Only Mao Qiuyu and the archbishop known as Daoist Baishi were unmoved. They had probably known of this matter in advance.

The great hall was awash in light. Mu Jiushi stood on the high platform at the place where the light was greatest, so her sight was somewhat affected. Moreover, even someone with her background could not help but feel nervous when thinking about what the Pope was on the verge of announcing. She did not notice the cries of alarm from the crowd and its momentary unrest.

In the next moment, she would become the successor of the Orthodoxy, the future Pope.

The current Pope glanced at her, his eyes brimming with compassion and love.

She somewhat bashfully smiled, but she was actually extremely calm and also a little excited, anticipating those words.

"Archbishop of the Hall of Announcements, Mu Jiushi, has gravely violated the laws of the church, presumptuously prying at the Heavenly Dao. How should she be punished?"

Cries of shock and murmurs of discussion rolled through the

Great Hall of Light like a surging wave.

The Orthodoxy will soon welcome the first female Pope; of course people will be shocked, Mu Jiushi thought, a reserved smile on her face.

Suddenly, her expression changed, her complexion turning extremely pale.

Because it was only now that she clearly heard the Pope's voice.

Gravely violating the laws of the church? Presumptuously prying at the Heavenly Dao?

Was the matter the Pope supposed to announce not conferring upon me the title of next Pope?

How could this be!

What's going on here!

Mu Jiushi was absolutely dumbfounded, suddenly turning her head to look at the Pope.

What she saw was still that elderly face, those two eyes brimming with compassion and love.

That compassion and love were not for her.

She could clearly tell.

She was furious.

"Why do you want to punish me!" she coldly said to the Pope.

She looked down at the crowd below the high platform, harshly yelling, "Who dares to punish me?"

The crowd was silent. Those priests who were qualified to attend the Offering of Light were all important figures of the Orthodoxy. They were all well aware of the background of the mysterious Archbishop of the Hall of Announcements. They also knew just what her existence meant for the great undertaking that was the Orthodoxy's existence in the new millennium. However, their silence now did not signal their unease. It was because the Pope's question had not been aimed at them.

The halls of the Orthodoxy each had their own role. The Hall of Drifting Clouds was responsible for punishments, and the Archbishop of the Hall of Drifting Clouds was already present.

Linghai Zhiwang looked to Mu Jiushi, gloomy flames of resentment burning in his eyes. "Thirty strikes of the staff, destroy her cultivation, and expel her from the Orthodoxy."

This was a statutory law of the church and any person in the hall

would be able to recite it. However, when they heard these three statements, they all felt a bone-piercing cold.

It had already been six hundred years since such a harsh punishment had been carried out on an archbishop of the Orthodoxy at Mu Jiushi's level.

Seeing Linghai Zhiwang's eyes, Mu Jiushi felt her body turning abnormally cold.

She knew that she could no longer remain. With a grunt, she turned and drifted out of the hall.

She believed that as long as she could leave the Great Hall of Light, Shang Xingzhou would be able to protect her. The position of Pope was now naught but froth and shadow, but there was always hope in the future.

However, just as she floated off the high platform, she realized that she had lost control over her body and heavily crashed to the floor.

Linghai Zhiwang brought several cardinals of the Hall of Drifting Clouds and expressionlessly reached her side.

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Indistinct and terrifying ripples of Qi emanated from deep within the pure and holy light, as well as Mu Jiushi's furious roars. In the end, she represented the Great Western Continent, so after Linghai Zhiwang received Mao Qiuyu's suggestion, he temporarily put off the thirty strikes of the staff with the excuse that the Divine Staff was not present. But destroying her cultivation...this was still a frightening matter and required enduring an unimaginable pain and torture.

The Pope did not hear it, so everyone in the hall did not hear it. All was quiet as a sleeping ocean.

With the assistance of Mao Qiuyu and Daoist Baishi, the Pope descended from the high platform and arrived amongst the priests.

He gazed at these people that had served him for several hundred years and said, "Three days ago, I said that I was about to die."

Mournful sobs arose from the crowd.

"After I die, I will pass on the position of Pope to Chen Changsheng," the Pope declared.

His expression was very calm as he spoke, just as if he was commenting that the Hall of Pure Virtue should be renovated or that the pigeons of the left park of the Li Palace might have been somewhat overfed.

After the battle of the Bridge of Helplessness, the Pope had bestowed the Divine Staff that symbolized the power of the Orthodoxy to Chen Changsheng. Everyone had understood what that meant. Now, he confirmed it once more.

This represented an irresistible will and august majesty. The entire Orthodoxy would be willing to sacrifice it all to protect these words, all the way until Chen Changsheng ascended to the seat of Pope.

With Mao Qiuyu and Daoist Baishi at their head, all the bishops, priests, teachers, students, and Orthodoxy cavalry kneeled to the ground like a tide.

Daoist Siyuan kneeled, Linghai Zhiwang kneeled. All gradually grew serene, then pious as the crowd began to sing Daoist odes, praising the starry sky and virtue.

Light burst from within the hall.

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"Old man Yin, my royal father won't let you go! My older sister will definitely take vengeance for me!"

From the distance came Mu Jiushi's faint roars of anger. These gradually dissolved into sobs, and then gradually drew further

away until they were no more.

This mysterious princess of the Great Western Continent, this once-Prefect of the Orthodoxy, was expelled from the Li Palace and would probably never have a chance to step into it again.

The Pope was watering his plant.

The Green Leaf within the pot only had three leaves left. They seemed rather weary, but they still had life. After the dust was wiped away, they had regained much of their spirit.

"Why?" Shang Xingzhou asked, no emotion in his voice.

"Earlier, you asked me, why should I let Chen Changsheng be Pope?" The Pope raised his head and calmly answered, "Because I want him to be Pope."

Shang Xingzhou was rather surprised by his answer, his gaze seeming to slightly sink.

This was absolutely not the junior brother he had known for almost one thousand years.

"Senior Brother, you said that you came to visit me today to discuss the successor to your teachings...but the Orthodoxy was not taught by you."

The Pope placed the wet towel by the pool and took out a dry towel to wipe the beads of water off his hands. "If one insisted on saying someone taught it, then this is my Orthodoxy."

Shang Xingzhou confirmed that his conclusion was not wrong.

Today's Pope was no longer that Yin of the past one thousand years. Why?

He impassively noted, "So for the sake of your emotions, you completely disregarded the state of humanity, the future of the Orthodoxy."

The Pope did not respond for a moment, then said, "On that night, the Empress said in the Mausoleum of Books that I was trapped by the words 'benefit of mankind'. This was correct. In the past, perhaps I really might have taken back the Divine Staff from Chen Changsheng for the state of humanity, the future of the Orthodoxy. Then, just as you desired, I would have conferred the title of next Pope on that girl."

Shang Xingzhou asked, "Why do you find it impossible to do now?"

"It's still that same reason. I am old, about to die. I still have to live a few days the way I want to live them," the Pope calmly declared.

When a person was on the verge of death, they naturally had the

right to act somewhat more indulgently. They did not need to look upon the world with compassion. They could act somewhat more freely, not needing to think about the state of humanity. They could be somewhat more short-sighted, not needing to think about the future of the Orthodoxy.

He was the Pope and the Orthodoxy was his, not anyone else's. If he wanted Chen Changsheng to be the next Pope, no one else could think about sitting on that throne.

This was a very persuasive argument.

Shang Xingzhou stared at him for a very long time. Suddenly, he said, "He was raised by me. Even if you want him to be Pope, he won't do it."

The Pope replied, "I will give the Orthodoxy to him. As for if he wants it or not, that's his own matter to consider."

Shang Xingzhou closed his eyes, then opened them once more, only apathy visible within them. "A dead person cannot be Pope."

The Pope's expression did not change. "You want to kill him?"

Shang Xingzhou emotionlessly noted, "Even if he was a small pup, one still feels a little sentimental after raising it for so many years. How could I bear personally killing him?"

The Pope said, "I was always confused as to how your teachings

could produce a student like Chen Changsheng. Now I understand, Chen Changsheng was never taught by you in the first place."

Shang Xingzhou answered, "Everything of his comes from me, of course he was taught by me."

The Pope calmly asked him, "If he was truly taught by you, how could you not know just how powerful he is when confronting death?"

Shang Xingzhou narrowed his eyes.

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The library of the Orthodox Academy.

"I was raised by him."

Chen Changsheng continued, "When I want to understand him, I can understand him very well. I know that three days ago when I brought the body of the Divine Empress out of the Mausoleum of Books, he intentionally wanted to leave a tail for this matter to make trouble. Even if my martial uncle, the Pope, continued to protect me, there would still be people like you who would use this matter to come and kill me."

Eunuch Lin nodded. "Correct: if I did not come to the Orthodox Academy, someone else would."

Chen Changsheng replied, "But there's a problem."

Eunuch Lin raised his brow. "What problem?"

Chen Changsheng raised the sword in his hand and calmly answered, "Can you actually kill me?"

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Chapter 674 – A Stone

Eunuch Lin's raised eyebrows slowly descended, but the corners of his lips perked upwards.

This was sorrow and self-ridicule, but ultimately, it was mocking Chen Changsheng.

Eunuch Lin had grown up in the Imperial Palace and possessed both incredible talent and extensive knowledge. He cultivated in the most masterly of methods and had reached the peak of Star Condensation many years ago. If not for the situation in the palace becoming extremely dangerous in Taizong's waning years—causing him to castrate himself and enter the palace at the most critical point in his cultivation, thus making him a person of irregular constitution—perhaps he might have already stepped into the Divine Domain.

No matter how talented Chen Changsheng was in cultivation, even if he had all sorts of treasures and countless tricks that had almost killed Zhou Tong on that night, he was still no match for Eunuch Lin.

He was only seventeen years old, and in Mount Han, he had failed to enter Star Condensation.

Earlier outside the Orthodox Academy, Su Moyu, out of concern for Chen Changsheng's safety, had prevented Eunuch Lin's followers from entering, stating that only one person was sufficient to proclaim a decree.

Eunuch Lin's answer had been that if he needed to kill Chen Changsheng, a decree and himself was enough.

These were not empty words, but the truth.

Yet now Chen Changsheng was very seriously asking him, "Can you actually kill me?"

Eunuch Lin's smile gradually faded and he said to Chen Changsheng, "Since I've been away from the capital for twenty years, it seems that youths nowadays have already forgotten who I am."

Chen Changsheng said nothing, using his actions to express his intentions.

Two plumes of dust drifted up from the bottoms of his shoes, a marker of his strength. Then, the dust and his clothes were suddenly thrown into disarray, transforming into several lines that dragged his blurred figure through the space of the library.

He vanished from his original position.

Ten-odd extremely faint footprints appeared on the glossy black floor.

Those footprints appeared simultaneously, no first or last.

If someone were to carefully examine the positions of these footprints, perhaps they might associate them with the positions of some stars in the sky or the lines on the Reflecting Monolith.

The incomparably complex positions of the stars, the incalculable pattern of stars, signified position and order, and contained a movement of position that surpassed speed.

It was the secret technique of the demons, the Yeshi Step.

The space at the front door of the library slightly deformed.

A figure of a sword pierced through the sunlight spilling in from outside.

Chen Changsheng's body followed.

He had already reached Eunuch Lin.

His speed was extremely fast, even giving off the impression of a lightning bolt.

Perhaps it was because when he used the Yeshi Step, he also used his most powerful Blazing Sword.

A sword glow illuminated the front door of the library, suppressing even the sunlight.

A blazing Qi enveloped the scene and quickly spread outwards.

The already yellowed grass outside the library instantly became even more listless. The pages of the books on the bookshelves of the library began to visibly curl as if deprived of all moisture.

A flame burned on the Stainless Sword as it stabbed towards the center of Eunuch Lin's brow.

Eunuch Lin became slightly serious, somewhat surprised at what had occurred.

He had not expected that the might contained within this strike would be so formidable!

Somewhat contrary to the rumors, the amount of true essence Chen Changsheng possessed was actually so abundant that it was in no way inferior to that of experts who had cultivated for several centuries.

Perhaps it had to do with this sword technique? It was said that Su Li had passed on to Chen Changsheng a sword technique that could explosively increase true essence in a very short amount of time, and it seemed that this was it.

While he was thinking of these things, Eunuch Lin's sleeve was already flying.

An extremely pure starlight emanated from his body and poured into his sleeves. Like two stone mountains descending from the heavens, the sleeves trapped Chen Changsheng's sword between them!

Confronting a divine weapon of the Tier of Legendary Weapons, the incomparably sharp Stainless Sword, Eunuch Lin had actually split his Star Domain into two and used them as weapons!

This sort of response was both brilliant and extremely tyrannical!

Battles between cultivators concerned themselves with perception, like the understanding of battle, adaptability, and experience. However, the most important aspect was still strength itself.

Eunuch Lin was a peak Star Condensation expert. His Star Domain was nearly perfect, his quantity of true essence exceedingly abundant. His understanding of the principles of the heavens and earth also far exceeded Chen Changsheng's. Thus, it was only natural for him to have control over this fight.

Would this battle end just like this? Of course not. Both Eunuch Lin and Chen Changsheng both knew that it had only just begun.

The Vault Sheath still contained several thousand exceptional swords.

With the protection of those several thousand exceptional

swords, Chen Changsheng was able to beat Zhou Tong until he was drenched in blood, and so he would at least be able to stave off Eunuch Lin for a few moments. Eunuch Lin understood this very well, so he was not intending to give Chen Changsheng any chance to take out those swords. It was for this reason that he chose to divide his Star Domain. This seemed like a valiant maneuver, but it was actually quite dangerous, even a strategy that treated his opponent lightly.

But what Eunuch Lin wanted to do was ensure that his hands were free.

Right now, his two sleeves, encased in his Star Domain, had sealed the edge of Chen Changsheng's sword. His hands, meanwhile, had emerged from the sleeves and fallen upon the center of the sword.

Chen Changsheng's sword was formed from the Stainless Sword and the Vault Sheath. Where Eunuch Lin's hands fell was the opening of the sheath.

Since he dared to place his hands there, Eunuch Lin naturally had some means of dealing with those swords, and perhaps had already made the preparations.

Suddenly, Eunuch Lin's eyes narrowed, filled with a feeling of incredulity. With a howl, he attempted to swiftly retreat.

What came out of the sheath was not a sword.

It was a small, black-colored stone.

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Logically speaking, such a small stone as this would never make Eunuch Lin feel as if he was confronting some dangerous foe, much less fill him with a desire to retreat.

But Eunuch Lin had carefully researched Daoist techniques and had an almost perfect understanding of the principles of the heavens and earth. When he saw the black stone, he sensed that something was wrong.

He could sense a strength that exceeded the mortal world accompanying this black stone.

Since it already surpassed the mortal world, it was naturally impossible to avoid.

Eunuch Lin's fingers opened like a blooming flower, crushing the air of the library and snatching the black stone in his hands.

With a crack, three of his fingers broke into thirteen pieces. Immediately after, his wrist bones shattered.

It was only then that he understood that this strength that

exceeded the mortal world did not originate from the Divine Staff, nor did it originate from some divine weapon he was unaware of.

This strength was weight, an unimaginable weight.

A weight like a falling sky fell upon Eunuch Lin's body.

His face became abnormally pale and his body trembled while countless cracks appeared on the floor below his feet.

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The black stone was a Heavenly Tome Monolith left behind by Wang Zhice.

The Heavenly Tome Monolith had always been very heavy, but the reason for this black stone's weight was that it was a door.

A door to the Garden of Zhou.

Three days ago in the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng had personally seen the Pope pluck off a green leaf, using the might of a world to attack the Divine Empress.

From that sight, he had comprehended a few things.

The black stone was not the true Garden of Zhou. It could only carry some of the Garden of Zhou's Qi. In other words, it was a very small part of the Garden of Zhou. However, Eunuch Lin was not the Divine Empress.

Since you used this world to suppress me, I'll use my world to strike you.

The Garden of Zhou was even larger than the Green Leaf World, but the Green Leaf was an entire world, while the black stone was only the door to a world, and Chen Changsheng's cultivation was still far from the Pope's.

Eunuch Lin had just never encountered this sort of unimaginable attack and his response had been too late to avoid it.

If he could hold on for just a little longer, he would presumably be able to find a way to resolve it.

However, these moments of time were sufficient to do many things.

The black stone appeared, the autumn wind madly blew about the library, and the sunlight dimmed.

Eunuch Lin seemed to be pressed down upon by the starry sky and found it extremely difficult to move.

Thousands of sword glows flowed out of Chen Changsheng's sheath and charged forward.

The sword glows tore through the starry sky, sliced apart the autumn wind, and stole the light from the day.

Countless sword intents crisscrossed through the air, innumerable sword cries resounded without end. Occasionally, Eunuch Lin's furious roars could be heard, accompanied by his explosive attacks.

Suddenly, all sound in the library vanished, the sword intents vanishing with them. The only thing that was left was absolute silence.

Boom! Countless fragments shot out of the library, forming a vast cloud of dust in the Orthodox Academy.

An autumn wind blew through the library, carrying away the dust and fragments, leaving a bright and clear scene.

All the doors and windows of the library were no more. It seemed absolutely empty except for two figures.

One standing, one sitting.

The one standing was Chen Changsheng, sword in hand, calm and silent.

Eunuch Lin, covered in blood, was sitting, his two legs splayed out on the ground.

Chapter 675 – Feeling for the First Time

Eunuch Lin's face was a ghastly pale white. Blood flowed from his body, yet it could not conceal the dense collection of sword wounds upon it. He presented an abnormally mournful and wretched figure.

He no longer had any of the lofty bearing from when he was standing outside the Orthodox Academy. He looked like an old beggar, his sight evoking pity in onlookers.

"Just what's going on here?"

His voice fiercely shook, his eyes filled with a disbelieving shock, and then they became somewhat blank.

Even now, he still did not understand what had happened when this battle had begun, why that black stone had possessed such a terrifying weight. Perhaps it was from the Divine Staff? But what truly shocked him, what he found impossible to accept, was that after Chen Changsheng had released the swords, he had not been able to find a single chance to counterattack.

In that period of time, sword glows had illuminated the library and thus concluded this battle. Chen Changsheng's sword was too fast, his swordplay incomparably sharp, his sword energy formidable beyond belief. His progression on the path of the sword had far surpassed Eunuch Lin's imagination, and he could not understand—even if this youth began learning the sword in the womb, it would still not be possible to reach such a level in a mere

seventeen years.

Moreover, in this battle, Chen Changsheng had also displayed even more inconceivable abilities, like his quantity of true essence, or like his...

"Perfect Star Domain! How is this possible!" Eunuch Lin shrilly yelled at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng replied, "Master might have forgotten a few things. With his blessing, my illness has already been cured."

Three-hundred-plus faint spots of starlight were currently seeping back into the depths of his uniform. It was possible to imagine how beautiful the sight was when, earlier, these stars had all simultaneously brightened.

When he spoke of blessings, his expression was very flat with no sense of gratitude.

However, he spoke the truth. On the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, the Divine Empress had changed his fate for him, curing his illness.

He had already succeeded at Star Condensation in Mount Han, and he had even condensed a perfect Star Domain. Now, his illness was cured and his true essence flowed freely, so he naturally became a perfect Star Condensation cultivator.

His meridians were now completely unobstructed, those blockades like mountain ranges having completely melted away into flat and spacious plains. Those snaking streams that always found it difficult to move forward had long since transformed into great rivers. Several years ago, the radiance from the stars had fallen from the night sky, penetrated through the library, and entered his body, becoming an extremely thick mantle of snow. Now, this snowy plain could be ignited with abandon and flow to its heart's content.

In the past two years, his meridians had been blocked, and he had only been able to rely on his sword techniques and Daoist techniques to repeatedly surpass cultivation levels to defeat his opponents. Several days ago, when heavily injured, he had only been able to rely on innumerable magical artifacts and tricks, Su Li's sword and Zhou Dufu's blade, and had still been able to almost kill a grand expert like Zhou Tong, but what about now?

It could be said with great confidence that the current Chen Changsheng finally possessed the ability to resist a true expert for a short period of time.

He was no longer that young patient who had come from Xining Village to the capital to seek a cure and change his fate. Now, he was a genius well-versed in the Daoist Canon, possessing a vast experience and incredible talent, taught by many great teachers.

Perhaps he still did not know what fate had in store for him, but at least there was no more shadow, only light.

Right now, killing him had already become an extremely difficult

task. As long as they were opponents below the Divine Domain, even if he could not defeat them, he could at least hold on for a period of time.

Those who had not thought of this point, such as Eunuch Lin, would receive a lesson that they would never forget.

Eunuch Lin had looked down on him and allowed him to make the first move. Consequently, he now sat on the ground, covered in blood, so shocked that he seemed to have taken leave of his senses.

Chen Changsheng, carrying his sword, walked towards the door of the library, the starlight gradually concealing itself back in his clothes.

The pale-faced Eunuch Lin leaned against the shattered threshold of the door, gasping for breath, but he discovered that some invisible barrier was cutting the library off from the outside world.

The Orthodox Academy had only reopened to take in new students a year ago and was still far from reaching the glory of its past, much less gaining back all the resources and strength it once held. However, as principal, Chen Changsheng was still able to control a few arrays.

"You are afraid." Chen Changsheng walked up to him and looked into his eyes. Somewhat confused, he commented, "It turns that you are also afraid of death."

Eunuch Lin, humiliated and furious, shouted, "Kill me if you want, but cease disgracing me."

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "You've misunderstood. I truly believed that you were not afraid of death."

Eunuch Lin froze.

Chen Changsheng seriously looked at him and said, "I've read many stories in books. Don't famous scholars and loyal ministers like you always believe that righteousness is in your hands, so you are never hesitant to die?"

Just as he said, this was a misunderstanding. He was not deliberately shaming his opponent, but his flat tone still enraged Eunuch Lin. Coughing blood, he sternly rebuked, "Not hesitating to die does not mean being unafraid of death! But everyone is afraid of death, because there are always people or concerns that can't be let go, like His Majesty."

"I'm not afraid," Chen Changsheng suddenly said.

Eunuch Lin was startled, asking, "What are you saying?"

Chen Changsheng earnestly stated, "I'm not afraid of death."

The library turned silent once more, the only sound being that of the autumn wind rushing in through the shattered windows and doors, flipping the pages of books and spreading around the scent

of dust from years past. This scent was just like his words, an extremely sorrowful scent, brimming with hopelessness. A life devoid of hope was just like those books on the shelves that no one had ever opened. No matter how abundant the contents, it was all meaningless.

If everyone was afraid of death because there were people or matters that they could not let go, then if he said that he wasn't afraid of death, did that mean that he had no people or matters to let go?

Eunuch Lin stared at Chen Changsheng, yet he could find no ripple of emotion on his face.

He was seventeen, in the prime of his youth, yet he was quiet like an old well, autumn waters, a fallen leaf, a dried-up tree: lifeless.

Eunuch Lin suddenly felt pity and sympathy for him and said no more.

But Chen Changsheng said something rather surprising.

"Go. I won't kill you."

Eunuch Lin narrowed his eyes and coldly replied, "This is the best chance for you to kill me, maybe even your last chance."

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning.

Eunuch Lin was a cultivator at the peak of Star Condensation, a true expert extremely close to the Divine Domain. If he had not looked down on his opponent and been suddenly attacked by the black stone, such a conclusion would never have come to pass.

If Chen Changsheng were to let him go, when next they met, Eunuch Lin would assuredly not act this way. Given the discrepancy in strength between the two, Chen Changsheng would have no chance.

"In the future...it might be very difficult for us to meet again," he told Eunuch Lin finally. "Please take good care of my senior brother."

Eunuch Lin was quiet for a very long time, then said, "It seems that you know very well what will happen today."

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

Eunuch Lin continued, "Principal Shang went to the Li Palace. After today, you will no longer be the Pope's successor. No one will come to help you, and you will have to directly confront the pressure of the entire world. Your position and the events that took place in the capital in the past three years have made many people uncomfortable, and those people were the victorious side in this incident."

Yes, whether it was the princes of the Chen clan, the Tianhai clan, or those ministers of the court, none of them were willing to

continue seeing Chen Changsheng in the capital.

Because of the problem with the division of benefits, because of the problem of position, and also because of a problem that no person was willing to voice.

When seeing Chen Changsheng, people would very easily recall the Divine Empress.

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The library was very quiet.

Eunuch Lin's figure gradually faded into the distance, but Chen Changsheng never once spoke.

There were no spectators, no records of this battle. In the coming days, very few people would recall it, much less mention it, and it would naturally not go down in the history books. However, in reality, this battle was very important. It was Chen Changsheng's most perfect battle since coming to the capital, and it was also the battle in which he finally became a true expert.

He had won and could have killed his opponent, but he did not, because this old man was loyal to his senior brother, and because he only wanted to win.

He just wanted to win once, to feel for once just what he was like when he wasn't sick, how it felt to not think about life and death.

As for other things, they didn't matter.

Those people wanted the Divine Empress's body, but he would not give it.

Those people knew he would not give it, so they wanted to use this matter to condemn and kill him, but he did not care.

So be it.

He turned to gaze at the sky above the Orthodox Academy and could faintly see the traces of several Red Falcons in the air.

The heavy stamping of hooves came from outside the Orthodox Academy, a torrential rain, a rumbling thunder.

The black-armored cavalry began to charge.

The sword array of the South Stream Temple would naturally be unable to withstand it.

This was not even accounting for those stern and gloomy Qis coming from the autumn forest of the Orthodox Academy. He just didn't know if they belonged to assassins of the Department for

Purging Officials or the army.

Soon after, countless people would pour into the Orthodox Academy and render the forest, the lake, the great banyan tree, and the buildings into dust.

Chen Changsheng would not accept this.

He took a letter from his bosom.

If he opened this letter, many people would die, and then he would probably die as well.

But he was very calm, very composed. The hand gripping the letter did not tremble in the slightest, as if he simply did not care about any of this.

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Chapter 676 – A City Sealed

To tear open the letter would be to grant death to others, then welcome death himself. But Chen Changsheng truly did not care.

Just as he had said to Eunuch Lin, he was at present truly not afraid of death, as there were no longer any matters he could not let go.

All the people and matters of this world had no meaning to him, because three days ago, he came to the sudden realization that his own existence had originally been itself meaningless.

He stood at the destroyed door of the library, holding the letter, quietly waiting for that moment.

The autumn breeze curled above the lake. A belt of light seemed to extend across the great banyan tree, which was still a flourishing green, a stark contrast with the golden-yellow leaves on the grass.

Time slowly passed, and the Orthodox Academy remained in peace.

Chen Changsheng raised his head to look at the gate, his eyebrows slowly rising, just like the fallen leaf that had just been swept up by the wind.

The thunderous downpour of hooves had stopped at some point.

The distant plumes of dust beyond the wall slowly settled and no longer rose.

The gate remained tightly shut, the walls unharmed. The leaf that had just fallen back into the waters of the lake attracted the pursuit of several fish.

All was peaceful. No one had charged into the Orthodox Academy.

Nobody appeared, not the black-armored heavy cavalry or those killers and experts of the Great Zhou Army and the Department for Purging Officials concealed outside the wall and in the forest.

Su Moyu and those students and teachers of the Orthodox Academy who were firmly guarding the gate had an even closer view.

They had seen Eunuch Lin's miserable appearance and could faintly guess at what had happened in the library. They were in shock at Chen Changsheng's hidden strength, and also understood what choice he had made.

The Orthodox Academy had reached its most crucial moment.

After Eunuch Lin left, the gate to the Orthodox Academy was tightly shut once more. Unexpectedly, the world outside the gates suddenly turned quiet.

They were very tense, and this sudden peace did not make them relax. They only felt it very strange.

The thunderous hooves earlier had been real, had been heard by everyone present.

The chilling murderous intent had also been real, the cold thoroughly penetrating through their uniforms.

The sword glows flowed like water, reflecting an autumn aura.

The sword array of South Stream Temple changed once more. Ye Xiaolian drifted out of the center of the array and came to the front, asking Su Moyu, "Just what is going on out there?"

Su Moyu revealed a determined expression and walked forward, his two hands pushing open the gate.

As the gate opened, a figure appeared before the teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy.

Light spilled through the gates, accompanied by two streams of clear breeze.

An old man stood on the stone steps in front of the Orthodox Academy, his back towards them, his two broad sleeves lightly dancing in the wind.

Su Moyu was somewhat shocked. "Principal Mao?"

He was 'Two Sleeves in the Breeze' Mao Qiuyu, the once-Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy. He was now Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons, but students of the Six Ivies like Su Moyu were still accustomed to addressing him as Principal.

Before Su Moyu could awaken from his shock, he was stunned once more by the other figures present.

The archbishops known as Daoist Baishi, An Lin, Daoist Siyuan, and Linghai Zhiwang were all standing in front of the Orthodox Academy.

Of the Six Prefects of the Orthodoxy, five were present.

Soon after, Su Moyu saw some even more familiar figures.

They were the current principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Zhuang Zhihuan; the Archbishop of the Temple Seminary; the absolutely loyal professor of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green; and also his previous teacher, the Principal of the Li Palace Academy.

The row of restaurants on the other side of Hundred Flowers Lane had earlier been knocked down by the troops of the Imperial Court, but now dust was rising from there, and a black tide of cavalry could faintly be seen.

The Orthodox Academy was still surrounded, but not besieged.

Because this cavalry was not the black-armored heavy cavalry of the Imperial Court, but the Orthodoxy cavalry under the direct command of the Li Palace.

The blades, spears, and divine crossbows of the Orthodoxy cavalry were aimed outward.

Su Moyu was still in shock, but he could vaguely understand that the thunderous hooves from before were not a sign that the black-armored heavy cavalry was charging, but that the Orthodoxy cavalry had come to the rescue.

He subconsciously turned his head back to the Orthodox Academy. He saw that the autumn forest was as peaceful as before, but at the walls and amongst the trees, the figures of many priests could barely be seen.

This was especially the case around the library, and there was even a cardinal of unfathomable cultivation standing ten-odd zhang away from the library.

This array of forces was truly too stunning.

This was the Li Palace displaying all of its strength for the world to see.

Before this strength, even the Great Zhou Imperial Court had to

give the appropriate respect and courtesy.

Su Moyu knew that the Orthodox Academy was safe and so relaxed. He then sensed that his back was somewhat wet and came to the realization that the instant he opened the gate, he had been so nervous that his entire body had been sweating.

The disciples of South Stream Temple and the teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy came up behind him to see what was happening. Overwhelmed with shock, they began to feel as if they had been given a new lease on life.

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The doors and windows of the library had been destroyed, and now the rich scent of autumn pervaded the room.

The Pope stood behind Chen Changsheng, saying, "To cultivators, life is an extremely long course of events. In this course of events, we will encounter many challenges, feel much despair, and this is our predestined fate. And how should we confront this predestined fate? To happily live on as if given a new lease on life, or to undergo serious contemplation before finding ourselves once more, that is the greatest distinction. I gave you three days to think, three days to come see me at the Li Palace, but you did not, so I can only come personally to ask you just what you are prepared to choose."

Chen Changsheng did not turn around, nor did he have any intentions of answering.

The Pope understood why he had not come in these past three days to seek help from him at the Li Palace. "You feel that all of us have deceived you?"

Chen Changsheng remained silent.

The Pope continued, "As long as you live for one more day, I will protect you for one more day. This is the promise I made to Mei Lisha."

Chen Changsheng still said nothing.

The Pope walked to his side and looked together with him at the window that no longer existed. "I am going to die."

As he was listening, Chen Changsheng's gaze was just on the grass by the shore. A thick layer of fallen leaves was there, suffused with a golden luster. It was very beautiful, carrying the rotting of death, a lifeless atmosphere.

He finally spoke.

"Martial Uncle, just what do you want to say to me?"

The Pope gazed at the forest of red and yellow and the rather

striking green of the great banyan tree, serenely saying, "The past is the past; such is time. Similarly, the movement of the stars, the changes of fate, all proceed forward, and so we can only look forward. No matter what has already happened, what harm they have dealt to you, at the very least, your illness is cured."

A normal person would think that in this coup of the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng had not suffered even the least harm. On the contrary, he had obtained the greatest benefit.

When one's eyes were closed, the sky would go dark, and after one died, one's world would be destroyed. There was naturally not a single thing that was more important than living, or worthier of celebrating.

The Pope was not a normal person and so would not think this way. He just wished to use this point to rouse Chen Changsheng from his stupor. "Mei Lisha had probably calculated this at the very beginning, resulting in his acceptance of Senior Brother's proposal. He believed that compared to the deception, betrayal, sorrow, and pain you would feel, you would receive sufficient return. This is my conjecture."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Martial Uncle, you know that I am not Tang Tang, nor Wang Po. I'm not that good at accounting."

There was a deeper meaning to these words, to which the Pope faintly smiled but did not take. He continued, "After today, your blood should also no longer be a problem. Not even the Empress dared to eat you, so there will naturally be no one else who dares to develop a craving for you. Only if the Demon Lord personally

appeared would there be a problem, but he has no time for that now, and it should be impossible for him to threaten you."

Chen Changsheng asked, "What's happened?"

The Pope answered, "No clear news has been sent back. I only know that Xuelao City has already been sealed for three days."

Chapter 677 – Without Illness

Xuelao City suffered from blizzards year-round and was extremely far from the human world, but news had never ceased to come from it.

The capital of the demons was a great city that was under just as much observation as the capital and Luoyang. Even if all seventeen of its gates were completely shut, there were still countless methods of sending information out.

However, Xuelao City had been sealed for three days now, yet the Pope still did not know just what had occurred within.

It was obvious that this was not some ordinary sealing of the city. Some momentous event must have occurred within its walls.

The matter of the Mausoleum of Books had also occurred just three days ago.

Chen Changsheng recalled those words his master had said to the Divine Empress. He had said that he had long since made preparations against the demons. Could it be that it was related to the sealing of Xuelao City?

He shook his head and no longer pondered these questions. What did anything that occurred in Xuelao City have to do with him?

The Pope examined his profile and sensed the change in his

emotions. "A useful body must be used to do useful things, whether for the common people of the world or calming one's Dao heart."

Chen Changsheng gazed at the fallen leaves outside, saying somewhat woodenly, "I've already been used many times."

Bystanders might have found these words rather puzzling, but the Pope understood his meaning. Pity and guilt appeared in his eyes.

"Besides being used, there are still others, like relatives or friends."

He said to Chen Changsheng, "You have the surname 'Chen', you are a member of the Imperial clan, and you still have many living relatives."

"Is Martial Uncle speaking of those princes? They want nothing more than for me to die a little sooner."

This was a very accurate judgment. Whether it was the Prince of Xiang whose power was certain to reach to the heavens or the Prince of Zhongshan about to take control of the powerful Great Zhou Army, the person they all feared was Chen Changsheng.

Because Chen Changsheng was also a member of the Imperial clan, Shang Xingzhou's student, a person famed throughout the world, and most importantly, he was the future Pope.

When fighting over the imperial throne or power, he was the opponent those princes of the Chen clan would least like to face.

As for familial affection, these words were a joke when it came to the Chen Imperial clan.

Almost a thousand years had passed, but no one would forget the coup of the Hundred Herb Garden.

These current princes were all offspring of Taizong. How could they permit a descendant of the deceased imperials to gain so much power?

The Pope understood Chen Changsheng's meaning. "Even if that's the case, you still have relatives."

The 'relatives' here naturally referred to those exiled imperials currently living on the Sacred Light Continent.

Like that monk who had appeared by the stream near Xining Village's old temple.

In terms of blood, those members of the Imperial clan who had been chased by Emperor Taizong to the other continent were naturally Chen Changsheng's relatives.

There was even a possibility that his parents were still living on that side.

Chen Changsheng understood that the Pope had mentioned those people living on the Sacred Light Continent not to make him do something, but to convince him that there was still a connection between him and this world.

This sort of connection might make him feel a little warmth for this world, to no longer be so bitterly disappointed. Or perhaps it would give him a few reasons to like this world.

He was somewhat moved by this.

But he was moved that the Pope was saying these words, not their actual content.

Because he had not a single good impression of these 'relatives' living on the Sacred Light Continent.

"Those people aren't my relatives, they're all bad people."

Chen Changsheng continued, "When I was still an infant, no, even when I might have still been in the womb, they did many things to me."

What things? So that the Tianhai Divine Empress would believe that he was Crown Prince Zhaoming, when he was just an infant or even still in the womb, the people of the Sacred Light Continent had used an external force to destroy his sun wheel and sever his meridians, then filled his body with what seemed to be the endless

Qi of life, but was actually the incredibly dangerous energy of Sacred Light.

When laying down this plan, neither his master nor his relatives on the Sacred Light Continent could ever have suspected that the Tianhai Divine Empress would ultimately defy the heavens and change his fate for him.

This also meant that at the conclusion of this plan, he would be either eaten by the Tianhai Divine Empress or ignored as he died.

This also meant that from its birth, that infant was foreordained to never live past the age of twenty.

This was a very cruel deed.

Thus, they were all bad people.

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"I'm quite good at medicine, and I've lived a very disciplined life. I've never eaten things that are too oily or salty, much less pickled foods. I've lived healthily and cultivated seriously. I said that I came to the capital from Xining to end the engagement, but it was really to cure my illness, to save myself, to defy the heavens and change fate. All of this, my goal in life, was for the sake of living."

As he gazed at the fallen leaves bobbing on the surface of the lake, Chen Changsheng's expression became somewhat gloomy.

"Now, my illness is cured. I can continue to live. I can live past twenty years, two hundred years, even one thousand years, but I suddenly discover that I'm just a body double, a tool, a fruit. My existence originally had no meaning, so what meaning is there in my continued existence?"

The Pope wanted to speak, but hesitated.

"Martial Uncle, I know that you want to console me, but right now, I have nothing."

He paused for a moment, then continued, "I don't even have an illness anymore."

When he spoke, his voice did not tremble in the slightest. He seemed very calm.

Even the Pope, who had experienced so many changes, who had perused all the matters of the world, felt anguish.

He had nothing, not even an illness.

How much sorrow and grief were contained in these calm words?

The Pope sighed.

He had come today to the Orthodox Academy precisely so that he could raise Chen Changsheng's spirits, or at least find for him a meaning to live. But Chen Changsheng had said to him that his existence itself had no meaning. He wanted to convince Chen Changsheng that this world still had kindness for him, but in truth, even before he was born, this world had only malice for Chen Changsheng.

He could have continued to persuade Chen Changsheng with a few words, like Yu Ren, or Xu Yourong, or Tang Thirty-Six.

But seeing such a calm and sorrowful seventeen-year-old youth, he could not bear to say anything more.

"In truth, I had originally believed that I would not see you in the Orthodox Academy, or I would see you packing your luggage. Since you are not, it means you are still hesitating. This world has no kindness for you, so you should treat yourself even better, make a choice that is best for you. Take your time, there's no rush. I can still live a few more days."

With these parting words, the Pope left the Orthodox Academy.

Chen Changsheng did not turn around. He still looked out at the autumn color beyond the window, so he did not realize how bleak and desolate the Pope's back looked.

The Pope left the Orthodox Academy. Mao Qiuyu and the other Prefects of the Orthodoxy left with him, followed by the several dozen cardinals and the Orthodoxy cavalry.

The cavalry and experts of the Imperial Court appeared no more. The Li Palace had displayed its strength and made its position clear.

Chen Changsheng was still the next Pope.

The Orthodox Academy regained its peace, its gate thrown open once more to welcome the rich scent of autumn.

Some teachers and students had availed themselves of the chaos to leave. Their names had all been written down by Su Moyu on a small notebook.

Most of the teachers and students had not left. They began to clean up, tidying up the fragments of stone around the library while also preparing for tomorrow's lessons.

Chen Changsheng went to the Hundred Herb Garden next door.

The forest here was much more lush and verdant than the forest of the Orthodox Academy or the Dallying Forest. These colors mixed with the flavors of autumn made for a beautiful sight.

There was a stone table in the forest.

There was no teapot or teacups on the table.

He sat by the table, staring off into nothing.

Chapter 678 – What One Thinks

Several dozen houses had been crushed flat, leaving only a tea house standing. As the dust settled in the depths of Hundred Flowers Lane, several carriages arrived.

There was no one in front of the Orthodox Academy's gate. It was very quiet, but in reality, countless gazes were secretly keeping an eye on this place.

Prince Chen Liu descended from his carriage.

The youngest county prince of the Great Zhou Imperial Clan still had his gentle expression that gave off the impression of a cleansing spring breeze. However, the noble air about him had gotten much thicker, and perhaps for this reason, he was much more easygoing, his appearance much brighter, his facial features much more distinct.

Fourteen princes surnamed Chen had entered the capital, the Prince of Xiang at their head. There was already a proposal in the Imperial Court that would soon confer the position of Chancellor of State upon the Prince of Xiang. Prince Chen Liu was the Prince of Xiang's son, and also the sole member of the Chen bloodline in the capital in the past ten-odd years. This fact caused him to be feared by many princes, and even his own brothers, but it was also a meritorious service. Without him, the princes of the Chen clan would have found very difficult to stabilize the capital in such a short amount of time.

Prince Chen Liu walked up to the gate of the Orthodox Academy.

No person came to welcome or obstruct him. Only a few forceful yet light sword intents came probing out of the wall like winter plum blossoms.

Several experts of profound gaze and clearly unusual cultivation arrived behind him.

Prince Chen Liu gestured to indicate that the experts of his estate should not move without his order and should remain where they were. He would walk in alone.

Even after walking into the Orthodox Academy, he remained unwelcomed and unobstructed. There was only the autumn sun reflected off the lake and the flourishing green of the great banyan tree.

Prince Chen Liu entered the library. In these past two years, he and Chen Changsheng had leisurely chatted, not at Clear Lake Restaurant, but here.

Several dozen young women by the lake, sitting or standing, whispered to each other.

Prince Chen Liu was somewhat perturbed at this sight. He thought to himself, the Holy Maiden has already returned south. Why are these disciples of South Stream Temple still staying here?

The teachers and students were cleaning up throughout the library. Su Moyu was arranging repairs and only after a priest at his side informed him did he notice Prince Chen Liu.

He knew Prince Chen Liu's reason for coming and straightaway said, "The principal is not present."

Prince Chen Liu thought, if it were me, I also would probably not meet any of the Chen Imperial clan.

"Then I'll wait," he said to Su Moyu.

Su Moyu replied, "The Imperial Court has many great concerns and there are many places where Your Highness is needed. If Your Highness has a concern, leave a message. There is no need to squander your time here."

Prince Chen Liu heard the meaning concealed in Su Moyu's words. He gave a somewhat bitter smile and answered, "Just treat it as me seeking my own peace of mind."

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Prince Chen Liu was noble and pure, each promise of his worth a thousand gold. This was something that many people knew.

If he said he would wait, he would really wait. Holding a cup of tea, he sat under a tree by the lake, smiling in response to the curious gazes of the young women of South Stream Temple. Finally, at twilight, Chen Changsheng returned.

The disciples of South Stream Temple and the teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy knew that the two wanted to talk and very naturally took their leave.

Holding his cup of tea, Prince Chen Liu gazed in silence at the grass and the fallen leaves upon it. After a very long time, he finally asked, "May I go to the Empress's grave to pay my respects?"

Chen Changsheng had not expected his first words to be these and was somewhat startled.

"Regardless of grudges and matters of right and wrong, the Empress treated me quite well." Prince Chen Liu raised his head and said, "I was raised by her for ten-some years before leaving the palace."

Chen Changsheng thought this over, then asked, "Was your life very bitter in those ten-some years?"

Prince Chen Liu was somewhat taken aback, then he bitterly smiled once more.

As expected of Chen Changsheng. Without needing to deliberately do anything, only looking into the true depths, he

could expose the truth of the matter with the simplest of statements.

"Correct...in those years, the Empress treated me quite well, and everyone in the palace treated with great respect, but I truly lived a very bitter life."

Prince Chen Liu bent down and placed his cup on the grass, then continued, "Because my surname was Chen."

Chen Changsheng looked into his eyes and asked, "So no matter how she treated you, you still wanted her to die?"

Prince Chen Liu very seriously pondered this for a time, then answered, "Perhaps because I never understood just what sort of person she was, so I feared her."

Chen Changsheng contemplated this answer, then agreed. "I also didn't understand her."

Prince Chen Liu looked at him and seriously said, "But even now, you still stand on her side...you know that I am speaking of standing on her side in spirit."

Chen Changsheng did not explain. "Your Highness, why have you come seeking me?"

Prince Chen Liu requested, "I wish to pay my respects to her."

Chen Changsheng used silence to give his answer.

He would not tell anyone where he had buried the Tianhai Divine Empress's body.

Even if Prince Chen Liu was raised by the Divine Empress.

"Ping was taken back by the Tianhai clan," Prince Chen Liu suddenly commented.

This was a matter that Chen Changsheng did not care about, but he knew that since Prince Chen Liu had mentioned it, he was going to say something more.

"Besides the person on the imperial throne, not much has changed in the world. There's an ugly side, but also a tender-hearted side."

Prince Chen Liu looked at him and said, "Perhaps this world has let you down, but I do not wish for you to lose all hope in this world."

Not long ago, the Pope had said something similar in the library.

Chen Changsheng asked, "Your Highness, just what do you want to say?"

Prince Chen Liu asked, "Do you still remember what Archbishop Mei Lisha said to us before his death?"

Chen Changsheng's thoughts returned to that room brimming with plum blossoms, recalled that elder and his face covered in wrinkles. For a long time, he said nothing.

"His Eminence said to me that I must remember the price that you paid."

Prince Chen Liu continued, "At the time, we didn't understand what he meant, but now, we know."

Maturing, fruit, sacrifice—many of the cryptic and incomprehensible words once mentioned by Mei Lisha now had an answer after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books. In order to overturn the Tianhai Divine Empress's rule, people had used Chen Changsheng, and for this, he had paid many things, very important things difficult to describe with words. If one had to use words to describe them, they would probably be: trust, hope, a sense of being, and emotions.

"I don't know what Principal Shang is thinking, what Father is thinking, what my uncles are thinking, or what my brothers are thinking, but the Chen clan owes you, and I will repay you in their place."

Prince Chen Liu looked into his eyes and earnestly declared, "I will exhaust everything to ensure your safety and interests."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Thank you."

He was very calm, even somewhat wooden, but a hint of warmth finally appeared in his body.

Prince Chen Liu added, "I understand what you are feeling, but I hope that you can pull yourself together as quickly as possible. Today, His Holiness gave such enormous support, and if you give it up, or leave, how can His Holiness face his millions of believers? And what of the teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy? And what will happen to His Majesty?"

Chen Changsheng thought of those words Eunuch Lin had said to him earlier in the day and felt rather tired. "I thought that these weren't questions that I was required to think about."

Prince Chen Liu answered, "If the rumors are true, and His Majesty really does love you as a brother, then these are questions that you must consider."

Chapter 679 – A New Era

Beginning three days ago, the Emperor of the Great Zhou was no longer the Tianhai Divine Empress, but a young man called Chen Yu.

He was the only son of Emperor Xian and the Divine Empress, and also the Crown Prince Zhaoming who had mysteriously vanished twenty years ago.

He was the student raised with utmost care for twenty years by Shang Xingzhou—the greatest master of the Dao in the Orthodoxy in this generation—and the monarch that fourteen princes of the Chen clan and the Tianhai clan had sworn their support to. Just what sort of problems could he possibly encounter?

Chen Changsheng knew that there was a problem within the Imperial Palace, but if the person he was speaking to was Tang Thirty-Six, he might say 'Or else?' or he would keep his silence.

Prince Chen Liu misunderstood his silence. When he thought of that young man, his face devoid of both sorrow and joy, quietly sitting upon the imperial throne and presiding over the court, he felt a slight weight upon his chest. His voice subconsciously became somewhat firm as he said to Chen Changsheng, "You should be well aware of how his disability will become the outlet for the ambitions of many people."

Chen Changsheng lowered his head and argued, "Master is there, and Eunuch Lin is there. Neither your father nor the Prince of

Zhongshan nor anyone else will dare to break their promise, and also, the Tianhai clan will assuredly support him."

Just because he had never expressed his views of the political situation of the Imperial Court did not mean he had never pondered, had never cast his gaze in that direction.

As His Majesty's family on his mother's side, the Tianhai clan would assuredly play this role well, or else their cold gazes as they watched her die would become a joke.

Prince Chen Liu stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes and rebuked, "You are not His Majesty, and it is impossible for you to experience the pressure he is feeling right now."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Senior is not someone who would like being an emperor. The pressure he feels does not come from those ambitious clans, but from the position of Emperor itself."

Prince Chen Liu thought, just who in the world is not willing to be Emperor? Even after experiencing the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng is still rather naive, immature. He could not help but sigh. Their conversation had already reached a rather involved level, but Chen Changsheng was still not willing to accept. Powerless to do more, he patted Chen Changsheng on the shoulder to express his consolation, then left the Orthodox Academy.

On that night, many people had died in the Imperial Palace. In the following two days, many people continued to die, whether it

was that chief eunuch whose name even now Chen Changsheng did not know, or those insignificant palace maids of the Palace of Autumn Fragrance who had never had names in the first place. They all became ghosts, and then, like the bloodstains that had been wiped clean, were gradually forgotten by everyone.

But even after such momentous events and the deaths of so many, the Imperial Palace never fell into chaos, because Shang Xingzhou, who had schemed for so many years, had already made the preparations. He had invited many elders back to the Imperial Palace. These elders were either attendants of the last Imperial Palace or old friends of Emperor Xian, such as Eunuch Lin. They had been forced out of the capital by the Tianhai Divine Empress's majesty, and now, they had returned.

Grand Tutor Bai Ying had also returned.

The autumn breeze blew into the palace, brushing his white hair, but was unable to move a single wrinkle on his elderly face.

He was currently reading through a set of remarks on a file. The words had been written in cinnabar red ink, written with grace, but lacking in vigor, imbued with a hidden tenacity. As for the comments in these words, they consisted of a few simple sentences, but they were very insightful and seemed to come from an incredibly experienced individual, giving sufficient leeway for the officials of the Imperial Court and the ministries and local officials of the counties and provinces to act.

This was the case for one file, and so it was for the other ten-odd files. Bai Ying found it impossible to maintain his composure and

dignity. He raised his head and turned to the desk beside him.

The young Daoist once of Xining Village had already become the young Emperor of the Great Zhou. His status had changed, but he was still much the same as he was in the past.

He quietly sat behind the desk, quietly flipped through books. As he looked through the books, he would occasionally take up a cinnabar brush and write something on them.

It was like he was still in Xining Village's old temple, reading Daoist scriptures and writing down his insights.

He was reading the files of the Great Zhou Dynasty from years past, and just like the sovereigns of the past, he was tasked with analyzing, judging, and making decisions. He was learning from the Grand Tutor how to rule a country.

The Grand Tutor's eyes grew slightly moist as he became incredibly emotional. He thought to himself, the son of Emperor Xian and the Empress is truly extraordinary, born to be a heroic sovereign, it's just a pity... His gaze fell on the young emperor's leg, his left sleeve, and that strand of black hair. He sighed as he thought, how can anything in the world be perfect?

With the arrival of dusk, today's lessons concluded, and the Grand Tutor rose and requested to withdraw.

With the assistance of a eunuch, the young emperor rose with

great difficulty and very properly bowed in the manner of a student.

As the Grand Tutor left the hall, the eunuch whispered a few questions. The young emperor shook his head, his expression warm.

Both the eunuch and the surrounding palace maids once more relaxed.

In the past few days, too many people had died in the palace, too much blood had flowed. Why they saw that the new emperor was unexpectedly blind in one eye, missing an arm, and required a stick to walk, they truly despaired. They had seen far too many deformed people and knew that these kinds of people were often frighteningly cruel. With them having to closely attend upon this emperor, they feared that if he was just slightest bit dissatisfied, they would suffer a heavy punishment. They had even mentally prepared themselves to be beaten to death alongside each other. Unexpectedly, in these two days, not only had this emperor not gotten angry, he hadn't even said any harsh words. They had never met such a mild and gentle master before. Even the young Prince Chen Liu, when he was being raised in the Imperial Palace, would occasionally have a small fit. Those people who were still loyal to the Divine Empress were forced to admit that for the Great Zhou to welcome this sort of sovereign...was, for them at least, the best thing that could happen.

The young emperor began to eat. There were many dishes, but he only chose the lightest to eat. He only took a few bites of the oily foods, and he only drank half a bowl of soup.

After the meal's conclusion, a eunuch proffered a cup of strong red tea to help the emperor digest the meal. The emperor shook his head, indicating that drinking some clear water would be enough.

The eunuch complied and had a cup of water served, then retreated to the gallery outside the hall. As he did so, he thought to himself, just who does His Majesty resemble? Emperor Xian or the Divine Empress?

No, the way the emperor ate and maintained his health only resembled one person, and that person was called Chen Changsheng.

To be more precise, it was Chen Changsheng that was very similar to him.

In Xining Village's old temple, for fourteen years, he had always been the one to cook, and he cooked according to Chen Changsheng's likes and requirements.

Chen Changsheng's personality, Chen Changsheng's likes, Chen Changsheng's favorite foods, had all come from him.

It was him who had raised Chen Changsheng in the first place.

The emperor walked out of the hall and stood on the stone steps, gazing at a particular palace wall in the twilight.

He knew that Chen Changsheng was over there. They actually weren't that far from each other, only several hundred zhang at most.

Close to the eye, yet distant on the horizon, because it was impossible for them to meet. There was naturally a reason for why they could not meet.

The twilight was like blood, plating Shang Xingzhou's figure with a strange color. He stood by a window on the side of the hall. For quite some time, he had been standing there, quietly watching him.

The young emperor stared in silence towards the Orthodox Academy for a very long time. Suddenly, he turned around and bowed to that window.

Shang Xingzhou very earnestly returned the bow.

Teacher and student were separated by the window, and there was nothing in the window, only emptiness, but this did not mean that there was truly nothing between the two.

They were teacher and student, and also lord and minister.

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The autumn wind atop the Dew Platform blew in all directions. As the darkness thickened, the Night Pearls on the edge of the platform gradually brightened. Shang Xingzhou, his hands held behind him, stood on the edge of the platform, gazing at the streets of the capital, at this world that he had not seen for so long yet was still very familiar to him. He calmly spoke, "Last night, the Prince of Zhongshan said to Minister Cui that he was also a grandson of Emperor Taizong's principal wife."

Now, the entire world knew that he was Emperor Taizong's most trusted minister. Everything he did was for the sake of completing Emperor Taizong's unfulfilled wish.

The Prince of Zhongshan's words seemed rather inexplicable, the meaning vague, but the intentions were actually very clear.

Since he was also a grandson of Emperor Taizong's principal wife, it was completely acceptable for Shang Xingzhou to support him. There was no need to support that young emperor.

"The words 'principal wife' can't just be randomly used." A voice came from the back of the Dew Platform.

Without turning around, Shang Xingzhou serenely replied, "It seems that you have a somewhat different view."

This person remained quiet for a very long time, then answered, "It would be too much of a lie if I said that I didn't have a view, but I clearly understand that this is not a matter that I should be

thinking of."

Shang Xingzhou's expression did not change, but his eyes showed an expression of deep satisfaction.

This person was very young and had a handsome face. He was dressed in blue and at his waist was a bright-yellow belt. It was Prince Chen Liu.

Shang Xingzhou turned to him and asked, "Then what do you want to say?"

Prince Chen Liu said, "Chen Changsheng is prepared to leave."

When the Pope went to the Orthodox Academy, he believed that Chen Changsheng had already left, or was in the midst of packing his luggage.

Chen Changsheng had not done these things, but this did not mean that he was not thinking about leaving.

Shang Xingzhou fell silent. After a long pause, he declared, "I will not let him leave."

Prince Chen Liu asked, "What does Sir intend by insisting he remain in the capital?"

Shang Xingzhou did not directly answer the question. "In my life,

there are two things I must accomplish. The first has already been done."

If the Pope were present, he would know that the first task was to overturn the Tianhai Divine Empress's rule and the second task was to thoroughly defeat the demons.

Prince Chen Liu did not know, so he was even more mystified as to why Shang Xingzhou had suddenly brought this matter up.

Just then, several extremely clear cracks appeared in the dusky sky. Soon after, several shrill bird cries rang out over the world.

Ten Red Geese and four Red Falcons had flown to the distant snowy plains in the north. Only three Red Geese and two Red Falcons had been able to return.

They brought news that people had been perplexed about and had been anticipating for a very long time.

Xuelao City was still sealed.

The Demon Military Advisor Black Robe and the Demon Commander had joined hands in rebellion.

All was in chaos.

The fierce snows wreaked disaster.

Seven Demon Generals had died.

Nanke had escaped, fleeing into the snowstorm.

The status of the Demon Lord was unknown.

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Chapter 680 – Inexplicable

All the gates of the Imperial City were tightly shut. The Divine Generals in the capital, the ministers of the court, and the princes were already inside the palace. Mao Qiuyu and Daoist Baishi had also hurried over from the Li Palace. With the passing of time, the intelligence delivered southwards from the snowy plains, that news which shook the entire continent and might bring about all sorts of unrest, was gradually being further detailed, more vividly portrayed.

Three days ago, on the very night of the coup of the Mausoleum of Books in the capital, a world-shaking event also took place in Xuelao City. The Demon Commander suddenly raised the flag of rebellion and led the army in attacking the Demon Palace. The Demon Lord suffered a sneak attack from Demon Military Advisor Black Robe and a hidden expert of the Council of Elders. Heavily injured, he fell into the Netherworld Spring, with no hope of survival.

The Demon Princess Nanke used a secret technique to explode her blood and shattered the barrier around the Demon Palace. Transforming into a peacock, she flew to the northeast, borrowing the sky filled with snow and wind to successfully escape. Seven Demon Generals loyal to the Demon Lord and tens of thousands of demon cavalry had been killed or executed in this rebellion. The streets of Xuelao City were so covered in blood that it seemed like a green ocean, intimidating all. Soon after, Black Robe and the Demon Commander presented the Demon Lord's youngest son as emperor and sent out consecutive edicts demanding that all the demon tribes and the army pledge their loyalty. At the same time, they issued an order of execution for Nanke.

Just what was going on here? All the major figures of the Great Zhou within the hall looked at each other in dismay. Even after this news had been confirmed as true from numerous different channels, they still found it difficult to believe...the greatest enemy of humanity for the past one thousand years, that devil who cast his shadow over the entire north, who not even Emperor Taizong had been able to kill...had just died like this?

Yes, one thousand years ago, the Demon Lord lost to Zhou Dufu and was severely wounded. This year, in Mount Han, in order to break through the array set up by the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, he had consumed a great deal of essence blood. A small number of people were also aware that when the Demon Lord was returning to Xuelao City, he had encountered the White Emperor. Presumably, in that earthshaking battle, his injuries had only worsened, but how could he just die like this?

What they found impossible to understand was, how could he die in a rebellion?

Who could find the strength to overturn the Demon Lord amongst the demons? It certainly could not be the Council of Elders, nor could it be any of the tribes who had had their brashness slaughtered out of them. It could only be the Demon Commander, who had control over a significant part of the Demon Army and also possessed an abnormally monstrous strength, and the enigmatic Black Robe, who had secretly gathered all sorts of power and influence. Moreover, the two of them would have had to work together.

The problem was that not even a storyteller with the wildest of imaginations would dare to think in this direction.

Everyone knew that Military Advisor Black Robe and the Demon Commander got along like fire and water. If the Demon Lord had not personally suppressed their conflict and mediated between the two so many times, it would have simply been impossible for the two to coexist.

The hatred the two had for each other could not have been fake, as this situation had already persisted for several centuries. Just who was it, then, that was able to make Black Robe and the Demon Lord discard their past enmity and take such an enormous risk? Who could the two have so much trust in that they would join hands and launch such a treacherous and terrifying attack against the Demon Lord?

Everyone subconsciously turned to a certain place in the hall. This was an unremarkable corner of the great hall. It was very quiet and serene, with no eunuchs or palace maids standing there. There was only a curtain of beads that noiselessly swayed in the autumn breeze, allowing the scene behind the curtain to be seen. Behind the curtain was not a seat, but a long hallway.

This long hallway led to a very ordinary room.

Many years ago, the legendary ministers who had their portraits in the Lingyan Pavilion were accustomed to spending their time in that room, drinking tea, playing chess, cursing, and passing that boring period before the court came into session.

At present, it had been many years since Emperor Taizong's soul had returned to the sea of stars, and those legendary ministers had followed him. There was no one left who would dare to be so relaxed within the Imperial Palace, to act with such magnanimity. Even the stories of the events within that ordinary room had been almost forgotten by the vast majority of people.

One person had not forgotten, because he was a person of that generation.

He was not placed in the Lingyan Pavilion, nor did he have the reputation of those legendary ministers. However, in truth, in that generation, he was even more important than most of the people in the Lingyan Pavilion. This was because before those legendary ministers died, before their portraits were painted by Daoist Wu, they had all been personally examined by this man. From another perspective, those legendary ministers had all been sent up to the Lingyan Pavilion by this man.

Right now, he was in that ordinary room.

Nobody knew if he was reminiscing of his once-comrades-in-arms, or if he was reporting something to Emperor Taizong.

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During the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, the Tianhai Divine Empress had once asked who would resolve the threat of the demons.

Shang Xingzhou said that he would be able to resolve it.

Han Qing believed that Shang Xingzhou could do it, so he had cast the Frost God Spear and completed the Autumn Slaying.

After three days had passed, the Demon Lord had truly died, Xuelao City was thrown into chaos, and Shang Xingzhou had proved his words.

Right now, Han Qing was probably hurrying towards Xuelao City. Would the once-crown prince of the demons be willing to see his youngest brother ascend to the throne of the Demon Lord?

The important figures in the hall all stared speechlessly at the silently swaying curtain of beads.

They could not see Shang Xingzhou, but their eyes were still brimming with reverence.

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In overcast conditions, the light of the capital would somewhat

reflect off the clouds, so the darkness was not too thick.

When there were no clouds, the vast sky of stars would shine over the world, and the darkness would still not be too thick.

In short, a flourishing place like the capital would very rarely experience an extremely thick darkness, such that one wouldn't be able to see one's own extended hand. The only exception was if a torrential rain were to extinguish the lights of every home.

The starlight was broken apart by Red Geese and several extremely precious flying carriages. Chen Changsheng stood on the great banyan tree, somewhat inexplicably beginning to recall that torrential rain from three days ago.

Perhaps it was because three days ago, many things had still not taken place. At that time, he still had the chance to pretend that his life was beautiful and peaceful.

Just like that period three years ago when it was just him and Luoluo in the Orthodox Academy.

However, one year ago, atop this great banyan tree, Tang Thirty-Six had said to him that there was something problematic with his teacher, problematic with a lot of people, and that he needed to carefully think about these problems.

Chen Changsheng had thought of these problems, but he didn't have the ability or wisdom to resolve them.

Tang Thirty-Six had left, compelled back to Wenshui by the Tang clan, and he didn't know if there would be a day when he returned.

Xu Yourong had left, forcibly dispatched by Mo Yu under the Tianhai Divine Empress's orders to Holy Maiden Peak. He did not know how great the storm would be when next she returned to the capital.

Zhexiu had left. Like a true lone wolf, he had vanished into the lights and darkness of the capital. However, he was surely still in the capital, but Chen Changsheng did not know what he was preparing to do.

What truly made Chen Changsheng somewhat lonely, or perhaps sad, was this: Zhou Tong was still alive.

He already knew the complete picture of the coup in the Mausoleum of Books.

The crabapple courtyard had been destroyed, but Zhou Tong was still doing very well. Moreover...he had also poisoned Xue Xingchuan to death.

The shifting in the capital had begun from the moment the Imperial Design had lost its effectiveness. It could be said that Zhou Tong had played the most important role in this.

He had betrayed the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Chen Changsheng could accept this fact.

Because Zhexiu was a wolf while Zhou Tong was a dog. A wolf would travel a thousand li to eat meat while a dog would eat shit.

But Xu Shiji had also betrayed her.

Even the Tianhai clan had betrayed her.

Chen Changsheng found it hard to accept these.

It had nothing to do with standpoints or factions. He just found it difficult to accept.

This sort of world was truly too inexplicable.

He truly found it impossible to like this sort of inexplicable and mysterious world.

Chapter 681 – Matters of Death

This inexplicable world operated by its own rule: rigid, monotonous, repetitive. Perhaps there might be the occasional unexpected circumstance, but if one looked deeper, it would still be a reproduction of those same old events. There was never anything new, whether it was under the sun or the stars. Plots and betrayals gave off nothing but the nauseating scent of decay.

Those youths who still looked upon this world with anticipation and hope, who still bravely stood under the sun and confronted the starlight, who looked up to virtue and morality in the stars, could never develop any good impressions of this sort of world. An example of this sort of person was Tang Thirty-Six. However, in the eyes of that noiselessly laughing second master of the Wenshui Tang clan, in the eyes of those elders of the Tianhai clan, in the eyes of Zhou Tong, the ways these youths thought were always so childish and laughable.

"Your life can't be spent playing house forever." Chen Changsheng could imagine that as he was escorted back to Wenshui, Tang Thirty-Six would be told many phrases similar to this.

He could even imagine that right now, in the Divine General of the East's estate, Xu Shiji, with a solemn expression and an aura of righteousness, was sitting at his dining table, all the dishes cleared away, arguing forcefully with Madam Xu. "Everything this father has done has been for his daughter. If not for my prompt decision, my strenuous efforts to hold back the tide, do you still think she would be able to firmly sit on the Holy Maiden's position after the Divine Empress's death?"

Starlight slightly scattered, the darkness slightly thinned, and the area in front of the Orthodox Academy went through a minor unrest. Soon after, Su Moyu hurried over to the lake shore and delivered the news to him.

The news from Xuelao City was truly very shocking. Chen Changsheng spent a long period of time in silence.

The Demon Lord's death was an extremely good thing for him. In the Garden of Zhou, he and Xu Yourong had been almost killed by Nanke several times, so he had no good feelings about that demon princess whose eyes were slightly farther apart than usual. But he couldn't help but be a little disappointed that his once-irreconcilable foe had vanished amongst the tempestuous waves of this rebellion like a splash of water.

"Leave the capital. This is the best choice," Su Moyu said to him.

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning.

The Demon Lord's death and the internal discord amongst the demons had all been arranged by Shang Xingzhou, and he had ascended to a position of supreme authority. While his deed remained fresh in the minds of humanity, no one would have the courage to go against him.

Today, the Pope had taken an extremely tough stance to protect him and the Orthodox Academy, but it could only maintain a balance of power.

But just as the Pope said, he was old and about to die. If that day truly came, how could Chen Changsheng confront that person?

That person was about to become a god of the continent, and he was also his teacher.

Chen Changsheng continued his long silence.

He truly did want to leave the capital. While he had been sitting in the library over the past three days, he had wanted to start packing his luggage several times, ultimately giving up on the notion each time.

He knew that it was impossible for him to leave, because that person would never permit him to leave his gaze, unless through death.

Yu Ren also knew this, so he quietly sat in the Imperial Palace, playing the part of emperor.

Chen Changsheng silently awaited the passing of time within the Orthodox Academy.

The pair understood Shang Xingzhou more than anyone else in the world, even more than the Pope.

Even though the teacher who had only been an ordinary Daoist

in their hearts was now an esteemed master of the Dao.

But whether he was an ordinary Daoist or a supreme master of the Dao, he was still their teacher.

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On the fourth day after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, shocking news came from Mount Han.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets had peacefully passed away in a small room on the shores of the Heaven Lake.

The head of the Storms of the Eight Directions was of the same generation as the Pope and Shang Xingzhou. In the end, he had still been unable to withstand time and his wounds, and his soul had returned to the sea of stars.

After being momentarily shocked by this news, the capital fell once more into an orderly chaos.

It was chaos because dead people were piling up everywhere, houses being searched, and possessions seized. It was orderly because all this was under the forceful control of the Imperial Court. The extent of the ripples and their intensity were both at a level that most people could endure, and it was not so bad as to have an overly adverse effect on the common people.

A few great ministers of Tianhai's court had died, but the vast majority of those who had been imprisoned had already been released. Only a few hardliners still bitterly endured. If they continued to endure past the autumn, perhaps they would be executed.

Perhaps because the Tianhai Divine Empress had used the true flame of the Heavenly Phoenix to burn Chen Guansong alive, and because Han Qing had left the capital after his true identity had been revealed, the Great Zhou Dynasty could not find a single general who was experienced enough to stabilize the situation. Occasionally, a fierce battle would take place amongst the armies of the counties and provinces. As a result, the purging of the army was correspondingly much crueler and fiercer.

Seven Demon Generals had died in the rebellion of Xuelao City, but the Great Zhou Dynasty had already lost eight Divine Generals, and several Divine Generals had been disheartened and retired to their fields. What chilled people's blood the most was that, according to a decree issued from the palace, Divine General Xue Xingchuan and the officers of the Imperial Guard loyal to the Tianhai Divine Empress had their corpses publicly exposed on the public road and were forbidden from being buried.

The entire world knew that the Divine General Xue Xingchuan and Divine General Tian Chui were the Tianhai Divine Empress's left and right arms, her most loyal subordinates.

The body of Divine General Tian Chui was already smoke, returning to the skies together with the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Xue Xingchuan had not received a similar treatment.

Without even bringing up the fact that Xue Xingchuan had forcefully resisted the Demon Army in the north and had once achieved great merit for the Great Zhou Dynasty, even if he was just an ordinary general, what need was there to have him suffer such disgrace after death?

Many people felt that this wasn't right, but no one dared to oppose it, as this was a decree from the Imperial Palace. In addition, they knew that this was the unyielding response some important figures had made to a certain rumor in the capital.

In this rumor, Xue Xingchuan had died under the schemes of Zhou Tong.

Zhou Tong had betrayed the Tianhai Divine Empress, and he had also betrayed his only friend.

With the spreading of this rumor, the level of loathing and shame the people felt for Zhou Tong reached all-new heights.

At that point, the decree was issued from the palace, and the bodies of Xue Xingchuan and those officers of the Imperial Guard were exposed.

Those important figures wanted to use this cruel display to tell the world that as long as one was willing to cut ties with the Tianhai Divine Empress, that person would receive their

benevolence and most unyielding protection. They did not even hesitate to use this method of disgracing the dead to show their will, to support Zhou Tong.

There had been a saying on the continent: if Zhou Tong were to die, only one person would be willing to bury him. That person was called Xue Xingchuan.

Now, Xue Xingchuan had died, died at Zhou Tong's hands, and it was even because of Zhou Tong that he would die without a grave.

This matter made people laugh in scorn, and many people were furious, but the entire capital still remained completely silent.

Perhaps it was because the news of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets's death had made the common people recall the words of the Pope on the night of the coup in the Mausoleum of Books. He was old and about to die.

If even the Pope died, who could endure the ire of that master of the Dao?

One person could endure it, perhaps because she had never even thought about whether she could endure it or not, because she was Xue Xingchuan's wife.

In the hours of the early morning, Madam Xue exited the city gate for the fourth time.

She came to the official road and gazed at those corpses randomly placed on the side, but she still could not distinguish which was the body of her husband.

Then she turned to the supervisor from the Ministry of Justice standing guard and said, "My lord, greetings, I wish to assist my late husband..."

Her face was somewhat pale, her expression tired, her lips dry, but she was still calm and possessed of a stern resolve.

The supervisor of the Ministry of Justice did not let her finish.

The crisp crack of a whip!

A corner of Madam Xue's dress was ripped away.

Perhaps because he had been intimidated by Madam Xue's composure and sternness and thus felt somewhat ashamed, the supervisor's voice was somewhat shrill and incredibly unpleasant to the ear.

"Xue Xingchuan followed the Demon Empress in committing evil. For conspiring against the state, his punishment is to have his corpse exposed for ten days, then fed to the dogs!"

Chapter 682 – The Living

Madam Xue was not frightened, nor was she angered. Looking at the supervisor from the Ministry of Justice, she softly said, "There is no such article in the laws of the Great Zhou."

The supervisor, seeing that she was not willing to retreat and was still so calm, couldn't help but grow more furious. Gesturing for his subordinates to come and drive her away, he cursed, "You old traitorous hag, if you don't scram and instead continue to obstruct this official from conducting official business, don't blame this official for being rude, and when the time comes, don't suddenly be afraid of pain!"

This was a naked threat.

No matter how persistent and unswerving Madam Xue's personality, it was impossible for her to overcome the pikes in the hands of those soldiers. She was preparing to depart with a gloomy expression when she suddenly felt that the voice just now was rather familiar.

She glanced again at the supervisor from the Ministry of Justice and realized that he looked somewhat familiar. Unsure, she asked, "Have...I met you somewhere before?"

The supervisor's complexion instantly turned unsightly and he harshly yelled, "Get this person away from here!"

The soldiers of the City Gate Department stepped forward,

preparing to drive Madam Xue away.

Madam Xue suddenly remembered and looked at the person with a little surprise. "You are Tianhai Sheng?"

The supervisor's face slightly paled and his voice became shriller. He yelled out to the crowd, "Just what are you good-for-nothings waiting for!"

At these words, the soldiers of the City Gate Department no longer dared to tarry. They raised their weapons as though about to strike, so as to scare her off.

Yet Madam Xue seemed to not see these blades and swords gleaming with cold light. She only stared at the supervisor of the Ministry of Justice standing outside the crowd, her face one of mockery tinged with grief.

She had truly met this person before, on her own estate.

This person was some side relative of the Tianhai clan. Using his relationship with the Tianhai clan, he had pestered many an estate for social connections. He had been extremely respectful to her and Xue Xingchuan, sending them extremely valuable gifts in search of a commission.

Xue Xingchuan had never accepted gifts, and neither had she, but he had ultimately helped this person. In the end, it hadn't been too big of a deal for them.

After several years, it seemed that this person had done rather well for himself in the ministry. He had been appointed as supervisor and had not been implicated in anything. Now, he was still given such a heavy responsibility by the Imperial Court.

When she thought of that person's face then and compared it to that person's face now, Madam Xue only felt a thorough irony in it all.

In this purging of the capital that had taken place over the last few days, the group with the fiercest stance and the most vicious of methods was not those old ministers who had opposed Tianhai for so many years, nor was it the princes of the Chen clan. Instead, it was those ministers of the court who were most loyal and devoted to Tianhai, and those officials subordinate to the Tianhai clan who once acted the most wantonly.

This seemed somewhat insane, inconceivable, but in the countless years of history, this had actually always been the case.

After a grand undertaking, those who seemed the most insane and often performed the most inconceivable of actions were precisely the traitors. It was as if only through these almost hysterical actions could they prove that their loyalty now was different from their loyalty then, could they convince themselves that they did not need to worry that they would be discarded by the new rulers, thus obtaining a freedom devoid of fear.

This was the case for the supervisor from the Ministry of Justice,

for the City Gate Department, for several eunuchs in the palace, for the subordinate officials of the Tianhai clan, and also for Zhou Tong.

It was said that in the early hours of the morning after the coup, Zhou Tong was treated by the Sacred Light technique. As soon as he began to recover from his heavy injuries, he convened his subordinates in the Department for Purging Officials and began to attend to business, protecting the emperor in service of the new government.

As she thought of these rumors and looked at this supervisor of the Ministry of Justice, the mocking aura about Madam Xue's smile became thicker and thicker, more and more dazzling.

The supervisor felt that his own eyes were about to be blinded and his malice soared. He no longer wished to drive her away, instead calling, "Capture her for me!"

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At the Li Palace.

Mao Qiuyu was currently watching the Pope water the Green Leaf. He reported, "The inspection of the Temple Seminary is complete. All the students have already returned. The Li Palace Academy...two students were sent to the Zhou Prison. In a little

while, Siyuan will personally go to get them back. Radiant Green's side is a bit more peaceful. All the gates of the Heavenly Dao Academy have been shut, and no students are allowed to leave. Only the Orthodox Academy has not paid any attention."

The Green Leaf in the pot was clearly just missing one leaf, yet it seemed to be missing much more, giving off a hollow feeling.

Without turning his head, the Pope said, "Since these matters have been handled adequately, go and see General Xue off."

Mao Qiuyu assented and turned to leave the hall. After a moment, he came back, saying, "Someone has already gone."

The Pope's body momentarily paused. "Who went?"

Mao Qiuyu replied, "That person."

The Pope was somewhat puzzled. "That child has a kind heart, but his personality is certainly not this straightforward."

Mao Qiuyu shook his head, explaining, "Apparently, he happened to be passing by."

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He had sat quietly in the library for three days, and then taken three callers in Eunuch Lin, Prince Chen Liu, and the Pope.

Chen Changsheng only knew of what had happened on that night, but he had no idea what had been going on in the capital over these past few days.

At this time, he and Su Moyu were strolling about the capital.

The reason they had gone walking was that the situation in the capital was gradually settling. He had sat in the library for too long, and both his body and mind felt somewhat sluggish. Moreover, he was well aware that just because it was very difficult for him to leave the capital did not mean that he could not leave the Orthodox Academy. Most importantly, he wanted to find out where Zhexiu was.

Leaves fell in the Luo River, lightly washed to and fro. He was just like those leaves, aimlessly wandering about.

Perhaps because he was acting according to the thoughts in the depths of his heart, this aimless walking happened to lead him and Su Moyu to the city gate.

This was also because the capital had never had a city wall, so the city gate was too inconspicuous.

The willows on both sides of the official road stretched off as two straight green lines into the distance. Under the bleak autumn sun,

they presented a delightful sight.

If not for the wailing, the noise, the blood, and that stench.

Chen Changsheng saw the bloodstains on the road and also the black flies in the fields to the sides of the road.

For there to be such large groups of flies in the cold autumn was truly vexing, just like those soldiers of the City Gate Department oozing with killing intent and those officials.

Many people of the capital were present.

Through the wary discussions and the whispered curses of the crowd, Chen Changsheng and Su Moyu very quickly learned the whole story of this matter.

He walked forward and saw that tired, haggard, weak, yet firm and persistent, calm, and brave woman at the very front of the crowd.

It was actually Xue Xingchuan's wife.

Then, he saw those brave and determined soldiers, covered in blood and severely injured, their eyes showing no remorse, only anger and unwillingness.

They were actually Xue Xingchuan's soldiers.

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A moment ago, just when those subordinates of the supervisor from the Ministry of Justice were about to assault Madam Xue, ten-some soldiers suddenly charged out of the city gate.

These soldiers were from the Cong Province Army. After receiving commendations, they had returned to the capital to rest for the autumn.

The Cong Province Army was where Xue Xingchuan had made his name. It was also where he had fought against the demons and achieved the most merit.

Xue Xingchuan had returned to the capital so many years ago, so he would naturally not remember these ordinary soldiers, but these soldiers had never forgotten their general.

They had been secretly waiting for a moment to steal Xue Xingchuan's remains and bury them. However, when Madam Xue was in danger, they found it impossible to remain in hiding.

The disorder very quickly concluded. Madam Xue had been frightened, but not injured. Those soldiers from the Cong Province Army had suffered disastrous casualties and were an appalling sight.

A deputy general of the City Gate Department looked at those heavily injured soldiers from the Cong Province Army and sternly rebuked, "Divine General Xue He has already been captured. In a few days, he will be sent back to the capital for trial. You muddle-headed soldiers actually dare to defy the decree and injure others? Are you plotting rebellion?"

Madam Xue's voice shook, yet was still courteous. "General, we just wanted to bury a body, not plot rebellion."

The deputy general looked at her in silence, then said, "Madam, anyone who dares to bury your husband's body is plotting rebellion."

The supervisor from the Ministry of Justice gave Madam Xue a jeering laugh carrying a deep malice.

This was a matter that was plain to everyone, but it was only at this point that someone so plainly stated it.

The Tianhai Divine Empress had died, Xue Xingchuan had also died, and Xue He would be dead in a few days. The second-ranked Divine General whose reputation once shook the entire continent was now nothing at all.

His remains could not be buried and had become an exhibit of the Imperial Court's strength, as well as implicit approval for the one who had poisoned him.

His widow was about to suffer all sorts of humiliation. Ultimately, she might cast herself into the water and drown, hang herself from a roof beam, or live out her bitter days until she died of old age.

His forsaken troops would also no longer receive any sort of honor. All that was left for them was unforgettable memories and pain.

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"At night, I'll come and take care of this matter."

Su Moyu stood in front of Chen Changsheng and spoke with an unquestionable tone.

Xue Xingchuan's miserable encounter was a [touchstone](#) for the new government, a wooden pole erected in front of the city gate.

Su Moyu knew that since Chen Changsheng had seen this, he would definitely care about it, but Chen Changsheng's identity was too sensitive. If he were to act, it would very easily become something big, so he decided to make it his matter to care about.

From any angle, this was a very courageous and rather more

dependable plan, but Chen Changsheng did not think so.

It had actually already been four days; how could it last for one day more?

He walked out of the crowd and up to Madam Xue, then said, "Greetings."

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(TN: A touchstone is a certain type of stone used to differentiate alloys of gold based on the mark they leave upon it. The wooden pole in front of the city gate is a reference to a story regarding Lord Shang Yang, a reformer of the state of Qin during the Warring States era. Shang Yang intended to carry out a series of reforms in Qin, but he was worried that the common people would not believe that the government was serious. Thus, Shang Yang set up a wooden pole at the southern gate of the marketplace in the capital of Qin and announced that anyone who moved this pole from the south gate to the north gate would receive ten taels of gold. No one attempted to move the pole, so he raised the reward to fifty taels of gold. A person finally moved the pole, and Shang Yang ordered that he be paid fifty taels of gold, thus illustrating that the government intended to do what it announced.)

Chapter 683 – Principle

Madam Xue was a wife who had had a very good upbringing and was very courteous. Even when her husband's body had been thrown into the fields to the side of the official road and she was enduring endless suffering and humiliation, she still did not lose her manners. Seeing this youth that she did not recognize, she softly asked, "May I ask if you need something?"

Chen Changsheng had walked out of the crowd to her because he naturally needed something, but it was something that the Imperial Court currently would not allow anyone to do: bury Xue Xingchuan.

Madam Xue was somewhat shocked upon hearing his answer. She felt deeply moved, but she shook her head, a grief-stricken smile on her face.

In the past few days, the capital had seemed completely silent, but there had actually been a few cries of injustice. However, those people had suffered the same fate as the soldiers returning from Cong Province Army and had been cruelly repressed.

She did not want this youth to experience the same fate.

Before Chen Changsheng had a chance to say anything, he was interrupted by a cold and stern voice.

It was Tianhai Sheng, the supervisor from the Ministry of Justice.

When he saw that youth ignore the cold edges of those blades and swords and walk out from the crowd, then heard the ensuing conversation, he found the whole thing very laughable. Of course, he was also very angry.

He didn't know who this youth was, but seeing the scholarly uniform the youth was wearing, he believed him to also be one of those students of the Six Ivies that had let their passionate blood get to their head.

"Your schoolmates have already been sent to Zhou Prison. Some were whipped a few dozen times, and now they've all been shut up in their respective academies."

He sternly rebuked, "I didn't expect that one of you still dared to make trouble. Are you blind?"

Right now, both sides of the official road were swarming with the soldiers of the City Gate Department and bailiffs of the Ministry of Justice. There were several hundred people forming a dense mass.

Those soldiers from the Cong Province Army had not been lacking in skill, but before such an array of forces, they had not been able to stir a single wave before being knocked to the ground, heavily injured.

If an average student of the Six Ivies were to see such a sight and still step forward, that was truly too hot-blooded, even reckless.

In the eyes of an official like Tianhai Sheng, this sort of student must be blind.

It had been a long time since Chen Changsheng had heard such words, since that spring day in which he entered the Orthodox Academy.

The Divine Empress, the Tianhai clan head, and even the Demon Lord he had encountered at Mount Han might treat him with disregard, but they would never look upon him with such disdain. After all, his status and identity were unique.

He did not react and thus seemed somewhat slow-witted. In Tianhai Sheng's eyes, this was obstinacy.

Tianhai Sheng did not like obstinate people because he had never once been obstinate in his entire life. As a result, he grew angry and shook his wrist.

With a crack, the whip in his hand flicked through the autumn breeze towards Chen Changsheng's face.

It flew with fury and no intention of sparing the lash. With this strength, if it truly landed on Chen Changsheng's face, it would leave an extremely deep wound.

And Tianhai Sheng wasn't prepared to whip him only once. He had already decided to whip this youth until he cried, until he was

rolling around and begging for forgiveness.

At this scene, the crowd erupted in cries of shock. Madam Xue's face paled and she wanted to pull Chen Changsheng, yet she didn't have the strength.

In the eyes of the crowd, Chen Changsheng had been scared witless, only able to stare at this leather whip, but what use was there in that?

Suddenly, the clear crack of the whip vanished.

A crossbow bolt came from nowhere and severed the whip in Tianhai Sheng's hand!

Tianhai Sheng stared at the remainder of the whip in his hand in shock, then stared into the distance.

It was at that exact moment that another crossbow bolt pierced into his left eye, causing blood to squirt out!

An anguished howl burst from his mouth.

The two sides of the official road beyond the city gate were filled with the crowd's frightened cries and sounds of fleeing, the entire scene falling into complete disarray.

At the front of the crowd, Tianhai Sheng held his wounded eye,

his face pale from pain, his entire body shuddering, and the remainder of the whip flailing in his hands as if he had gone insane.

Chen Changsheng took Madam Xue's arm and took two steps back.

The disarray did not persist for too long.

The deputy general from the City Gate Department yelled a few stern commands to have the bailiffs of the Ministry of Justice step forward and take the whip from Tianhai Sheng's hands. As preparations were made to treat him, the soldiers of the City Gate Department surrounded the site. Neither the spectating commoners nor the heavily injured soldiers of the Cong Province Army were able to leave.

The cavalry searched in all directions, attempting to quickly find the crossbowman.

Chen Changsheng and Madam Xue stood on the official road, their surroundings completely devoid of people.

Mounted on his horse, the deputy general looked at Chen Changsheng as if wanting to say something, but he ultimately chose to keep his silence.

Chen Changsheng glanced at him and knew that his identity had probably been recognized.

However, just a moment ago, he had only looked at Tianhai Sheng's whip, and then the whip had been broken. Right after that, Tianhai Sheng's eye was blinded by a crossbow bolt.

In the eyes of the crowd, he was either a devil or some divine immortal.

The soldiers of the City Gate Department naturally thought him a devil, and when they saw this devil look at their own commanding officer, they instantly became extremely nervous. In a few moments, blades and swords had been unsheathed, spears prepared to stab.

The deputy general, with an extremely ugly complexion, raised his hand to indicate that nobody should move.

Su Moyu finally squeezed out of the crowd. Seeing the scene before him, he slightly relaxed. "Fortunately, you didn't act blindly without thinking."

The deputy general replied, "He did not recognize Principal Chen and even said that Principal Chen was blind. So he was blinded, and it served him right."

Chen Changsheng was naturally famous, but not many people had truly seen him from up close, even in the capital.

But this deputy general was Xu Shiji's subordinate, so he had

naturally paid close attention to Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy. Thus, he had recognized Chen Changsheng.

He said to Chen Changsheng, "But I must warn Your Eminence, if Your Eminence insists on this, it really will..."

Chen Changsheng answered, "I will also be accused of plotting rebellion?"

The deputy general's expression turned even nastier as he thought, not even the Prince of Xiang would dare to charge the future Pope with this sort of crime.

"This lowly subordinate cannot take charge of this situation."

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The City Gate Department was responsible for the peace and safety of the capital, a very important role. Only an important figure, highly qualified and deeply trusted by the Imperial Court, could take charge of it.

Like the Divine General of the East, Xu Shiji, once deeply trusted by the Divine Empress and now highly regarded by the Prince of Xiang.

The crowd had already been driven far away. Madam Xue, who had been in somewhat of a daze ever since she had learned of Chen Changsheng's identity, had been brought by Su Moyu to the side to rest. There were very few people on the road.

This was because Xu Shiji did not want too many people to hear his conversation with Chen Changsheng.

With three years gone by, the relationship between him and Chen Changsheng had gone through many changes.

He could no longer use his capacity as father, nor could he suppress Chen Changsheng with the dignity of a Divine General. If Chen Changsheng persisted, he would even have to bow.

This was impossible for Xu Shiji to accept.

"This is a decree from the palace. Even you cannot defy it."

He sternly warned Chen Changsheng, and then his expression became a little gentler. "In addition, were you very close with Xue Xingchuan?"

Today's matter seemed to be rather trivial, but in reality, this was a grand undertaking so that the new government could establish its might.

Xu Shiji knew that he had encountered a complication, but he didn't know why Chen Changsheng was always complicating

things for him. Could he still hold a grudge over that matter and would not rest until Xu Shiji's reputation was at its lowest?

He did not want to fall into such a situation, so he forcefully suppressed his anger, attempting to use mild words to persuade Chen Changsheng.

In the view of Xu Shiji and many other people, Chen Changsheng and Xue Xingchuan were not at all close. In the past, they were even in separate factions and enemies, so why was he doing all this?

"I was not close with Xue Xingchuan." Chen Changsheng looked at him and asked, "But I hear that Sir was very close with him?"

Xu Shiji's complexion was extremely ugly.

He and Xue Xingchuan had been the two generals the Tianhai Divine Empress trusted in the military. The latter had been in charge of the Imperial Guard while the former led the City Gate Department.

It was only right that he and Xue Xingchuan be close. They weren't just colleagues, but fellow soldiers, comrades, friends.

If one said that Chen Changsheng was not close with Xue Xingchuan and so did not have the duty or responsibility of burying Xue Xingchuan's body, what of Xu Shiji?

Chen Changsheng had not thought this far. He was just speaking according to what he thought in his heart, but he made Xu Shiji speechless.

After a very long time, Xu Shiji took in a deep breath and said, "This is a decree."

Chen Changsheng replied, "But it is without principle."

Xu Shiji coldly returned, "A decree is the greatest principle in the world!"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "To eat when you are hungry, to sleep when you are drowsy, to take medicine when you are sick, and to bury someone's body after they die, these are truly the greatest principles."

Chapter 684 – True Person

Eating when hungry, sleeping when tired, treating the sick, burying the dead—these were unalterable principles of the heavens and earth.

What were the principles of the heavens and earth? They were the greatest principles in the world.

Chen Changsheng's voice was spread along the autumn breeze, casting the surrounding crowd into silence.

Xu Shiji had no words to respond. Before these sorts of principles, anything he said was lacking in principle.

Chen Changsheng walked into the fields to the side of the official road, his clothes glistening with starlight that even the elegant sunlight could not conceal.

Xu Shiji's expression slightly chilled. "You wish to attack me?"

This question was both a threat and not a threat, and even more like a warning or notice.

It had nothing to do with strength or authority. Chen Changsheng had heard those unspoken words loud and clear.

I am Xu Yourong's father; are you sure you want to attack me?

Before the battle of the Bridge of Helplessness, whenever Chen Changsheng thought of Xu Yourong, he would occasionally feel some sympathy or pity, because Xu Yourong had a father like Xu Shiji.

This time, he felt that Xu Shiji was the pitiful one. Of course, the pity here was of a different variety, a pity that made one feel somewhat weary.

He paid no attention and walked into the field.

Su Moyu acted according to Chen Changsheng's intentions and brought Madam Xue to the official road to wait.

Many gazes fell upon Xu Shiji.

The troops and officials of the City Gate Department gripped their swords and spears, clueless as to what to do.

Xu Shiji knew that there was nothing he could do.

The crossbow bolt that had blinded Tianhai Sheng of the Ministry of Justice had clearly come from a divine crossbow. Although the bailiffs of the Ministry of Justice and the cavalry of the City Gate Department had still not found the crossbowman, he was very sure that the Orthodoxy cavalry were nearby. Moreover, deep within the alleys near the city gate, he could faintly make out the figures of several cardinals.

Very quickly, several cardinals arrived on the scene, followed closely by many priests of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education.

The priests ignored the gaze of Xu Shiji and the changes in expression of the personnel from the City Gate Department and the Ministry of Justice as they began to administer treatment to the injured soldiers of the Cong Province Army.

There would naturally be people to take care of the matter in the fields as well.

Chen Changsheng returned to the official road.

Only now did Madam Xue truly confirm his identity. Still somewhat astonished and deeply moved, she sincerely said, "Thank you, Your Eminence, for your grace."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Madam, there's no need for your thanks. I didn't know of this matter, I just happened to see it while passing by."

Madam Xue said, "I am only worried that this matter will affect Your Eminence."

Chen Changsheng replied, "There's no harm."

Xu Shiji had been on the side this entire time, watching with a

cold stare. He realized that Chen Changsheng and Madam Xue were complete strangers, finally confirming that there truly had been no friendly relationship between him and the Xue Estate. However, this fact served only to increase Xu Shiji's confusion.

To defy an imperial decree and run counter to one's own teacher for the sake of a corpse, was this worth it?

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said suspiciously, "I don't believe that you did this out of so-called principle."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I'm not Wang Po who does everything for the sake of straightness. I made this choice because it naturally posed some benefit to me."

Xu Shiji revealed a mocking smile as he thought, just as expected.

"I cultivate the Dao of following my heart. No matter what matter I encounter, I must always act according to my heart, or else my cultivation will be greatly affected."

What did it mean to follow one's heart?

If he saw the green hills and found them charming, then it was okay.

If he saw the green hills and found them displeasing, he would remove them.

If the road forward was fair and straight, that was okay.

If he saw injustice on the road, it would naturally be time to unsheathe his blade.

If the scenery was bright and beautiful, he would appreciate it.

If all before him was filthy smoke and disease, how could he remain silent?

Su Moyu sighed in praise. To follow one's heart in such a way, just how was it different from Wang Po's path of the blade?

Xu Shiji asked his final question. "Could you really not be afraid?"

Chen Changsheng did not answer this question. Turning around, he walked back into the capital.

Four days ago, he had carried the Tianhai Divine Empress's body down from the Mausoleum of Books and buried it in the Hundred Herb Garden.

He had even done this, so what need was there to worry about Xue Xingchuan?

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The bodies of the high-ranking officers were all buried. A few more graves appeared on the outskirts of the capital, but nothing at all occurred within the capital.

This surprised many people. After all, the Imperial Court's will had been so unyielding in the past four days as to seem particularly cruel. Everyone believed that the Orthodox Academy and Chen Changsheng would assuredly face a storm, even if the Li Palace once more displayed without hesitation its intent to protect them.

In the autumn winds and rains, what came to the Orthodox Academy was not the soldiers of the Imperial Court, but Madam Xue.

In the spring, the Orthodox Academy's conference hall had been repaired, so it was there that Chen Changsheng met Madam Xue.

Madam Xue once more expressed her sincere gratitude, and Chen Changsheng once more expressed that there was no need.

Madam Xue commented, "Truthfully, my late husband was always very curious about Your Eminence."

Chen Changsheng was somewhat confused. "Divine General Xue mentioned me when he was at home?"

Just as was said yesterday, he was not friends with the Xue clan, and they could even be thought of as strangers. He did not understand why Xue Xingchuan would have mentioned him in his own home. Of course, he might discuss matters of the court with his wife, the worries of the Divine Empress, but curiosity...that was more in the realm of the personal, having nothing to do with those rumors regarding Crown Prince Zhaoming.

Madam Xue looked at him and said, "He said that Your Eminence was only the second true person that he had met in his entire life."

After he came the capital from Xining, the people of the world had many evaluations of Chen Changsheng: overflowing with talent, composed and early-matured, serene as the spring breeze.

He did not know that before Xue Xingchuan, some people had already used 'true person' to describe him.

Madam Xue continued, "My late husband did not understand—Your Eminence was clearly the one who had cut off his younger brother's arm, yet whenever he met Your Eminence in the palace or elsewhere, you were always able to remain so calm."

Chen Changsheng understood that this was referring to that period when he was escorting Su Li back south and used his just-learned Intellectual Sword to cut off Divine General Xue He's arm in the wilderness.

Afterwards, he had met Xue Xingchuan quite a few times. Logically speaking, he should have been remorseful, or vigilant, or

at least displayed some difference in emotion, but he had not.

He never even mentioned this matter to Xue Xingchuan, acted as if it had never taken place.

"At the time, Xue He said to me that since I didn't kill him, he would remember my kindness."

Chen Changsheng thought, then continued, "They are brothers, and I didn't want Divine General Xue to remember this kindness, so I did not mention it."

Madam Xue sighed with great emotion.

Back then, in the wilderness, Xue He had said, "You did not kill me, only cut off my arm, so I will remember your kindness."

Backstabbing was the most common occurrence in the world, so if a normal person were to hear these words, they would assuredly not treat them as true.

Yet Chen Changsheng had treated them as being true.

Xue Xingchuan had thought this fact over for a very long time before finally concluding that Chen Changsheng was so calm and never mentioned the matter because he probably treated those words as true.

On that same night, he sighed with emotion to his wife and praised, "Chen Changsheng, a true person."

Chapter 685 – A Way to Live

'True person' was very unusual praise.

Chen Changsheng fell silent for a few moments, then asked, "There was still another?"

Just now, Madam Xue had said that he was one of the two that Xue Xingchuan thought to be true persons.

Madam Xue did not directly answer this question, but used a different method. "Your Eminence is truly the Divine Empress's son."

Chen Changsheng understood. "Regretfully, I'm not actually her son."

Madam Xue noted, "I am deeply gratified to hear Your Eminence say that it is regretful."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Yes, I don't think it's shameful at all to have such a mother. Although she wasn't a good person, she was a truly outstanding person."

Madam Xue sorrowfully sighed, "That's right, or else why would my late husband and the rest of them be willing to follow the Empress until death?"

Chen Changsheng suddenly asked, "Do you feel hate?"

If speaking of hate, Madam Xue had far too many reasons to feel hate. If speaking of regret, she had also reasons to feel regret.

This hate and regret was not all meant for the new government. There was also some meant for that supervisor of the Ministry of Justice, for Xu Shiji, and also for this period of time.

Madam Xue very calmly replied, "No, I only hate that Zhou Tong isn't dead."

Chen Changsheng calmly gazed into her eyes. He did not speak, did not console her.

Madam Xue was extremely smart, so she understood. Thus, she was somewhat shocked and deeply moved. She wanted to give him a few words of advice, yet couldn't open her mouth, as she had no idea what to say.

Chen Changsheng had said nothing at all, so what advice could she give?

The two said their farewells. At the gate of the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng said to Madam Xue, "I ask that Madam does not leave."

According to the information sent from the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, the Xue Estate had already been emptied, boxes and

luggage already piled up at its back gate. It seemed that Madam Xue might return to her hometown in a few days.

Yet Chen Changsheng had asked that she not leave.

Madam Xue understood his intentions, because he understood her intentions.

After a very long period of silence, she managed with some difficulty to give a faint smile. "Very well, I will be here to see it."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Madam will see it."

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After being raided, the Xue Estate had sent away all its servants. Whether they were part of the main branch or the secondary branches, any person that had not been implicated for the moment had already been sent back to their hometown. At the moment, the only people remaining in the estate were Madam Xue, a servant woman, and an old butler. It seemed very deserted, and if Madam Xue's intentions had been followed, even the servant woman and the old butler would have already left. However, she had been unable to convince them.

The servant woman said, "Since we have to arrange a funeral, no matter how simple it is, we still have to buy a few things. We

should at least share some of the burden with the Madam."

Madam Xue shook her head and said, "The person has already been buried, so there's no need for a funeral."

The butler commented, "Since the Imperial Court has said nothing, they've silently agreed. In the coming days, there will presumably be some important people or old comrades coming to offer their respects. We have to welcome them."

He was thinking of how things had been done in the past, but only stimulated Madam Xue's sadness. She indifferently replied, "Do you think anyone will dare to come?"

The butler thought, the old master was a hero of the generation with a vast circle of friends in the capital. As long as the Imperial Court does not issue an explicit decree, someone will come.

Madam Xue said, "Since we plan to have a funeral, where will we get the money?"

The butler thought about this problem for a few moments, then said, "For the moment, we can't sell off that offering field on the outskirts of the capital, but the store on the Western Boulevard..."

The present Xue Estate no longer had any money to use. If they wished to set up a presentable funeral hall, they could only sell off the family property that had not been seized, and it had to be the best property to gather sufficient money.

Western Boulevard was the most flourishing part of the capital, and the stores on that street made money hand over fist. No one had ever been willing to sell one off.

Seeing the Madam's hesitant expression, the butler thought that she was unwilling and advised, "Once we return to your home, no one will be there to watch the store. Sooner or later, we will have to abandon it. Since we have no plans of coming back, there's no need to keep it."

After a period of silence, Madam Xue replied, "Don't sell the store."

The butler was somewhat shocked and continued his persuasions. "Madam, you should..."

Madam Xue shook her head, saying, "I know what you're worried about, but I've already changed my mind. I don't plan to leave the capital."

The butler was even more shocked at these words, but before he had time to speak, he heard the Madam say, "In the next few days, return home and bring Brother Jin back."

Brother Jin's full name was Xue Yejin, Xue He's only son. The butler had already heard the news that Second Master Xue He was currently being escorted back to the capital and was probably doomed. Right now, Brother Jin was the sole descendant of the Xue clan. The day before yesterday, when Madam Xue had

confirmed the decree from the Imperial Court, she had sent him back to her home on the same night, so why had she suddenly decided to bring him back? After all, this was an enormous risk, as no one knew if the new powers of the Imperial Court might suddenly change their minds.

With a shaky voice, he said, "Even if Brother Jin returns, there's no one to watch those stores."

"Brother Jin is my Xue clan's sole descendant; how could he waste his time on these common affairs? He is returning to the capital to study," Madam Xue seriously declared.

The butler inwardly grumbled, just which school in the capital would be willing to accept the descendant of the Xue clan? Even the most ordinary of private schools will probably shut their gates to Brother Jin.

Madam Xue did not voice aloud her future plans. She said to the butler, "First busy yourself with the matter of the funeral. As for money, use this first. If it's not enough, we'll discuss the matter again."

As she spoke, she took a hairpin made of pure gold from her hair and handed it to him.

The butler could only accept the order. Taking the golden hairpin, he left the estate.

The servant woman brought up a cup of tea and said, "Madam, please, wet your throat a little."

Madam Xue took a sip from the cup. Seeing her pale reflection in the tea, she suddenly smiled.

It was different from the past few days. Although her smile was still exhausted today, it was somewhat brighter.

Then she felt that the tea was somewhat sweet.

If there was blood in the throat, it would probably also be sweet.

This was something she and Xue Xingchuan had once chatted about.

They had just been married at the time. On the second day over which she was supervising offerings, she realized that there were problems in the clan's accounts, that a lot of money was flowing to the wrong places.

It just so happened that there had been a lot of rumors around the estate in that period.

She had felt somewhat sad. At dinner, she had not been able to drink any soup.

Xue Xingchuan had no other means than to tell her the truth.

Only then did she discover that her husband had been adopted, that he had a younger brother, and that brother was called Zhou Tong.

To console her, Xue Xingchuan had chatted with her about other people's business and told her many interesting anecdotes. He had also talked with her about matters concerning the battlefield, like how blood in the throat would taste sweet.

If that golden hairpin were stabbed into my throat, it would also probably be sweet.

Madam Xue thought.

From the very beginning, she had never intended to leave the capital.

After burying Xue Xingchuan, she had intended to commit suicide and follow him.

Until yesterday, when things changed.

She was not intending to die.

She intended to continue living in the capital, because she wanted to personally see Zhou Tong die.

She also wanted to raise the sole descendant of the Xue clan in

the capital, because she wanted him to study at the Orthodox Academy.

The sounds of sobbing could be heard outside the hall.

The servant woman led a swollen-eyed noble lady into the hall.

The noble lady entered the room and fell directly into Madam Xue's lap, weeping as she said, "Mother, how can we continue to live?"

Madam Xue looked at her eldest daughter who had been married off to the assistant minister of the Ministry of Rites, her expression calm. "You've been driven away?"

The noble lady was given a fright, then angrily replied, "I did nothing wrong! There's no way the Wei clan would dare to drive me away!"

Madam Xue asked, "Since you weren't driven out, why are you crying?"

The noble lady's eyes reddened once more. "They've treated me poorly."

Madam Xue replied, "If your husband's family is not willing to tolerate you, come back."

The noble lady was somewhat embarrassed. "In the past few days, Father-and Mother-in-law have had rather ugly expressions, but he...has actually been rather polite."

Madam Xue calmly replied, "Polite? If he continues to be polite, then the two of you should mutually divorce."

The noble lady was somewhat hesitant. "But what of the child? In addition, he's treated me rather decently, and after things calm down, Brother Jin's prospects..."

Madam Xue replied, "In the future, it's fine if Brother Jin enters the army. The court's okay as well, and so is managing the stores. It's also fine if you just get married again. How can it be impossible to not find a way to live?"

The noble lady pondered these words, then forcefully nodded her head. "Mother, these words are reasonable. I'll say that exact thing to him."

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Chapter 686 – Digging a Hole

Zhou Tong looked at the middle-aged man in front of him and laughed, his smile deep and unfathomable. "These were Madam Xue's exact words?"

The middle-aged man's expression was somewhat uneasy. "My wife has a hasty temper, but I don't think she would lie out of anger."

"Many thanks to the Lord Assistant Minister for coming to say this to me."

Zhou Tong's attitude was sincere, his eyes gentle.

But when Assistant Minister Wei of the Ministry of Rites left, his eyes very quickly turned cold.

Only a few days had passed since the events of that night. As one of the participants, he would naturally not forget.

Those loyal and devoted subordinates also would not forget.

To be more precise, the beginning of that night was that blade glow in the crabapple courtyard, his near-death at Chen Changsheng's hands.

If not for that blade, perhaps the situation might not have

developed very differently, but the role he would have played in it might have been extremely different.

Xue Xingchuan was his only friend in the world.

Xue Xingchuan was the only person that trusted him in the world.

Thus, he had been poisoned to death.

On that day, in the Imperial Palace, he had received the treatment of the Sacred Light technique. With Shang Xingzhou also personally treating him, he had almost completely recovered from his injuries.

In the future, he would have an even higher status and even greater authority in the new government, and his position would be all the more unshakable.

To announce and prove this fact to the world, Xue Xingchuan's body had been thrown at the side of the official road and forbidden from being buried.

In the end, Chen Changsheng had buried Xue Xingchuan's corpse, Madam Xue was no longer intending to leave the capital, and that child called Brother Jin was being brought back. The Xue Estate...was even planning on holding a funeral!

Of course, Zhou Tong knew what all these things meant. They

were a slap to his face.

The crabapple trees were naught but shards of wood, the courtyard an absolute wreck. The buildings of the Department for Purging Officials on the surface had all been destroyed, and only the prison below remained in good condition.

Zhou Tong stood amongst the ruins, gazing up in silence at the light clouds in the sky, pondering this or that.

A subordinate looked at Zhou Tong's rather lonely expression and said tentatively, "Your Excellency..."

"My face has always been very thick, or else I wouldn't have lived up to this day."

Zhou Tong indifferently said, "Principal Chen has already struck my left face. If he's still interested, I can turn my head and let him slap my right face until he's happy."

The subordinate seemed unwilling to accept this. "For what reason?"

Zhou Tong drew back his gaze from the sky and impassively answered, "Because he's Principal Shang's student, His Majesty's junior brother, the chosen successor of the Pope. He has every right to slap me in the face."

Exposing the corpses of Xue Xingchuan and those several high-

ranking officers of the Imperial Guard in the fields was a decree of the Imperial Court. Who would dare disobey?

Chen Changsheng dared, and who would dare use the violation of the Great Zhou's laws or the defiance of the decree against him?

Why? Just as Zhou Tong had said, if the Imperial Court did not want to split with the Orthodoxy right after overturning the Divine Empress, they could only endure it.

Everyone in the Imperial Court had to endure it, and Zhou Tong was but one member of it, even if he was an important one.

The subordinate angrily asked, "Then how long must we endure?"

Zhou Tong fell silent, then said, "Even the Empress has died, so everyone must die."

He was not speaking of Chen Changsheng, but the Pope, who had already admitted in front of the Mausoleum of Books that he was old and about to die.

On the day the Pope returned to the sea of stars, perhaps Chen Changsheng really would become the next Pope, but no one—not the Imperial Court, or Shang Xingzhou, or the collective consciousness of the Orthodoxy—would permit him to continue acting as a youth, even though he was very young. This was what it meant to wear the Divine Crown and accept its weight.

Zhou Tong just needed to endure until that time came.

"Let him slap all he wants. He's not killing anyone."

There were many people in this world that wanted Zhou Tong dead.

There were many great ministers of the new government, the Prince of Zhongshan and several other princes included, that wanted nothing more than to feast on his flesh, but they could do nothing.

Chen Changsheng could use many methods to display his attitude to Zhou Tong's shamelessness, could change up the method by which he slapped his face, but he could not kill him.

Just as had been said many times before, Zhou Tong symbolized Shang Xingzhou's promise to the entire world.

The subordinate was still somewhat uneasy. "Then what about the funeral that the Xue Estate is holding?"

"Holding a funeral? It looks more to me like digging a hole." Zhou Tong laughed, then said to his subordinate, "It's not important whether or not the courtyard can be rebuilt to its original appearance, but I need a crabapple tree here, exactly like the crabapple trees from before. Remember to dig the hole for the tree extremely deep so it can live well."

To this small courtyard in the alley of the Northern Military Department, this crabapple tree was very important.

It served the same purpose as he did to the world.

They were both symbols.

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Rebuilding Zhou Prison was a very troublesome project. The Ministry of Works and the capital government had dispatched many laborers and excellent craftsmen.

The work proceeded very smoothly. In just two days, a framework had already been built, but time was still very pressing. The laborers were still engaged in painstaking labor, even after nightfall.

A hole for a tree was dug out at the base of the courtyard's wall. The hole was very deep, and so it could be assumed that any type of crabapple tree would be able to grow very well inside.

When darkness was at its deepest, the laborers and craftsmen finally rested.

No one noticed a figure come to the wall of the courtyard and jump into the hole.

There was a very soft swish like a knife cutting into tofu.

Countless cold lights glimmered from the fingers of that figure, but it was clearly not some sort of weapon.

The earthen walls of the hole truly seemed just like tofu, rustling as they were cut into.

Then, that figure vanished.

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The Xue Estate held a funeral.

The funeral hall was within the estate, not visible from the street. There was only a white flag, and besides this, there was no other change.

There wasn't even any wailing or music. It was truly cold and deserted to the extreme.

There was no music because no musicians dared to take work at the Xue Estate.

There was no wailing because there were no guests coming to pay respects, so whether sincere or feigned, the people within the estate could not remain in profound grief forever.

This was a sight that many people had already predicted.

Xue Xingchuan's remains had been buried by Chen Changsheng.

The Xue Estate's funeral arrangements naturally took on a different meaning as well.

Some people even believed that this was a competition between the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy, between master and disciple, Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng.

Through this funeral, one could clearly see which way the wind was blowing in the capital and even the entire continent.

From a certain perspective, anyone who was coming to pay respects to Xue Xingchuan was also paying respects to the Divine Empress.

There were certainly people who were still loyal to Tianhai's old government, but who would dare display it?

In the chilly funeral hall, the butler looked at Madam Xue and sadly said, "It seems...no one else will be coming."

Let alone the ministers of the court, not even the officers in the army, those old friends, or even the Li Palace showed any reaction.

The only exception was that Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan had come in the early morning to pay their respects.

These two Prefects of the Orthodoxy actually had rather ordinary relationships with Xue Xingchuan, but everyone knew that they were the same as Xue Xingchuan, the staunchest supporters of the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Madam Xue looked at the deserted gate of the estate and calmly replied, "There will be some people that wish to come. Even if it's not convenient for them to come, we have to at least wait."

Yes, many people in the capital wished to pay respects to Xue Xingchuan. With the friendships they had with Xue Xingchuan, it would be completely unreasonable for them to not come.

But for various reasons, they did not dare come and were thus forced into an extremely difficult position.

Just as Zhou Tong had said, the Xue Estate's holding a funeral

was just like digging a hole for these people.

Would they jump or not?

Time slowly passed.

The sun slowly moved across the sky.

The time came.

The Xue Estate was still deserted. Still, no one had come.

Chapter 687 – Intruding Upon The Xue Estate

The courtyard within the alley of the Northern Military Department was gradually regaining its original appearance. The hole by the wall had already been dug very deep, but the crabapple tree had still not been sent over.

Obtaining a crabapple tree exactly identical to the one from the past was no easy task, even for the Department for Purging Officials, whose power extended to all levels of society.

Zhou Tong was well aware of this point, but he did not display the slightest displeasure to his opponents, especially after he heard the quick succession of reports.

"Assistant Minister Wei did not go back. Apparently, a large quarrel took place in his estate last night."

"When Lord Huang of the Imperial Board of Astronomy was about to leave, he discovered that his clan's carriage had been borrowed. The borrower was a relative of his wife who said that he was returning to Wu Province."

"Tianhai Shengxue had already boarded his carriage, but he was stopped by his clan's Guardians. Apparently, a fierce conflict took place between them. Ultimately, Chancellor of the State Chenwu had to appear before things settled down."

"There has been no noise from the Prince of Xiang's estate, but Prince Chen Liu has not appeared for the entire day. According to our analysis, the prince has probably been locked inside the shrine at the back of the estate."

Ever since he had learned two days ago that Chen Changsheng had appeared to bury Xue Xingchuan's body, Zhou Tong had had a rather unsightly expression, especially after he heard that the Xue Estate intended to hold a funeral.

Although he had always appeared very calm, his subordinates and many people in the palace were able to tell that his mood was rather disastrous.

When he heard this news, however, his complexion began to improve, and the cold indifference in his eyes gradually began to thaw.

No one dared to pay respects at the Xue Estate; this was an expected matter.

The Xue Estate had held a funeral, giving many people within the capital a way to show their feelings, and also to dig a hole.

Although it was said to be paying respects to Xue Xingchuan, in reality, it might as well have been paying respects to the Divine Empress.

Today, the Imperial Court was watching the Xue Estate, so who

would dare appear?

"Chen Changsheng?" Zhou Tong suddenly asked.

A subordinate reported, "No one has come out of the Orthodox Academy this entire time."

"I did not think that our Little Principal Chen would be so cool-headed, that he had such grasp over what is within norms."

Zhou Tong held his hands behind him and walked out of the courtyard, saying, "But this situation inevitably makes one sigh about the inconstancy of human relations. And that's right, besides me, who could develop a real friendship with him?"

His subordinates were all stunned by these words, not understanding why their lord was speaking this way.

Zhou Tong stopped and turned to them, speaking with a serious tone. "The entire world knows that he was my only friend. Did none of you know?"

The subordinates gazed at the smile upon their lord's face and felt their bodies turn cold. They were utterly mystified as to how to respond.

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By the lake in the Orthodox Academy, Mao Qiuyu looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "It now seems that I truly worried too much. You had always been much more mature than your peers."

"So you came here at the crack of dawn to keep watch over me." Chen Changsheng gazed at the lake and said, "But, in truth, I don't much understand your meaning."

Mao Qiuyu explained, "What you did two days ago was already enough. To do more might border on excessive."

Chen Changsheng thought this over, then asked, "Who decides what is within the norms? Who laid down these rules?"

He already knew that today, besides Daoist Siyuan and Linghai Zhiwang, no one else had come to the Xue Estate's funeral.

"Norms and rules all come from a unique and unequalled will."

Mao Qiuyu looked at him and said, "While His Holiness the Pope still lives, the Orthodoxy only has one will, so it can only have one voice, but when His Holiness returns to the sea of stars? When Your Eminence succeeds to the position of Pope, you will still not be twenty, and it will be very difficult for Your Eminence's will to be placed above the Orthodoxy. It can only mutually exist with others."

These words seemed rather vague, but they were actually very clear. The smooth succession of the Orthodoxy depended on the successor's ability and methods, not just on the will of the Pope.

Maturity, composure, an understanding of norms, patience, and sense of responsibility—these were all things in which ability and methods took concrete form.

Mao Qiuyu continued, "His Holiness's health is not very good."

Chen Changsheng replied, "In another few days, I will go to the Li Palace and see him."

Mao Qiuyu replied, "His Holiness will presumably be very appreciative."

Chen Changsheng did not respond for a few moments, then said, "I am actually not sure if Martial Uncle will be happy to see me."

Mao Qiuyu replied, "Step by step, you are learning of the relationship between a sense of responsibility and silence. This in itself represents growth."

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "In truth, Your Eminence has spoken incorrectly. I did not go to the Xue Estate today because I chose to remain silent, or because I chose to stay within the norms out of a sense of responsibility. I just felt that the inconstancy of human relations is very commonly seen. Moreover, it doesn't have much to do with me. As you know, I truly was not close to Xue

Xingchuan."

Yes, contrary to what Zhou Tong thought and Mao Qiuyu praised, Chen Changsheng did not refrain from visiting the Xue Estate out of silent endurance or proper norms. He just felt that he was not close with Xue Xingchuan, so there was no apparent need to go. In addition, he did not know what he should say in front of Madam Xue and those people overcome with grief and lamentation.

"I'm not skilled at consoling others," he said to Mao Qiuyu.

Right then, Su Moyu suddenly walked in.

Mao Qiuyu asked, "What's happened?"

Su Moyu bowed, then said to Chen Changsheng, "Zhou Tong brought people and went to the Xue Estate."

Chen Changsheng glanced at the sky, then said, "What hour did the Xue Estate set for the moving of the coffin?"

With a somewhat stern expression, Mao Qiuyu said, "If you change your intentions because of another's intentions, it will not be in accordance with your Dao."

This was a word of advice, and also a warning.

Chen Changsheng replied, "One's heart can always change, and to admit to these changes is to truly follow one's heart."

Mao Qiuyu asked, "Why did it change?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I am not close with Xue Xingchuan, so I did not go to the Xue Estate. But I'm very close with Zhou Tong, so I should go now."

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The Xue Estate was lonely and cheerless, the white flag flapping in the autumn breeze seeming very lonely and pitiful.

Lonely and cheerless did not mean that no one was around. At the head of the street and the end of the alley, many people were staring at the gate of the Xue Estate from a distance.

Some of the gazes belonged to the meddlesome and fearless idlers of the capital, but most of the gazes belonged to representatives of the capital's great powers.

From early morning until now, not a single guest had arrived outside the Xue Estate's gate, not even a sparrow.

Hooves were suddenly heard from the street, accompanied by the

sound of a strong wind flapping against clothes.

Several dozen officials and experts of the Department for Purging Officials and even more redcoated cavalry escorted Zhou Tong to the Xue Estate.

In a very short time, the gate of the Xue Estate was crowded with people, but there was still no noise. All was held in a deathly stillness.

The street was far too silent, such that even the sounds of paper threads burning behind the gate could be faintly heard.

Zhou Tong took a white cloth from a subordinate and tied it to his waist, after which he walked into the Xue Estate.

The butler of the Xue Estate saw this sight and wanted to stop him, but he lacked the courage. His legs had already gone unbearably soft.

A beautiful woman dressing in mourning clothes barred his path, angrily shouting, "You still have the face to come?"

Zhou Tong looked at her and asked, "Madam Wei has come back?"

He gazed into the deserted estate and shook his head, sorrowfully saying, "What need is there for this? I came to light incense for Elder Brother Xue so that he won't be too lonely in the sea of stars."

With a pale face, the woman shouted back, "Father wouldn't want to see an ungrateful scoundrel like you!"

"The friendship I had with General Xue is not something you women could understand."

Saying this, Zhou Tong calmly walked into the Xue Estate as if he was returning home.

In this entire process, he did not even glance at Madam Wei.

The officials of the Department for Purging Officials pushed Madam Wei to the side, not letting her come near Zhou Tong.

Seeing her hated foe about to intrude upon her home and thinking of how her father's soul was certainly unable to find peace, Madam Wei felt both grief and indignation. Powerless to stop him, she exploded with curses and abuse.

Zhou Tong slightly frowned at these incessant curses pouring into his ear, finding them rather unpleasant. "Your father was the hero of a generation. How could he raise a shrew like you?"

A subordinate took out a ball of cloth and stuffed it in Madam Wei's mouth.

Chapter 688 – To Die Without a Place

After coming to the Xue Estate, Zhou Tong spoke in a tone like that of an elder, especially when he was reprimanding Madam Wei.

As he stood within the estate, he seemed very relaxed, as if he was very familiar with the place. This was because he truly had come here many times. He seemed just like an elder that had returned after doing business abroad for many years.

In short, it was very easy to get the feeling that this place was Zhou Tong's home.

This made people very angry, because everyone knew that the master of the Xue Estate had been mercilessly and shamelessly poisoned to death by this man.

The butler of the Xue Estate furiously came forward with a broom, intending to wrest the young lady back from the hands of those officials, but he was forcefully pushed to the ground.

The servant woman cried out in panic and ran into the estate.

Madam Xue hurried over and saw the scene. Her voice slightly trembling, she asked, "Zhou Tong, just what are you planning to do?"

Zhou Tong quietly stood in the middle of the courtyard, looking

at the green plants growing before him. Many memories gradually began to flash across his mind and fill him with sorrow.

In truth, not even he knew why he had come here or what he wanted to do. It was only now that he understood that he truly did wish to see that man's face once more.

He turned to Madam Xue and slowly said, "I will light incense and then leave."

Madam Xue's voice was still somewhat shaky, but her expression was particularly firm. "You know that this is an impossible matter."

Zhou Tong indifferently replied, "This is not something that you can decide."

The scheme from several days ago, the poison in the medicine, and the exposed corpses on the side of the official road—these things all concerned the Xue Estate, and also had nothing to do with them.

The people of the Xue Estate were powerless to decide whether they would live or die, receive honor or disgrace. They could only hopelessly accept it or wait to be rescued.

But no one dared to come to the funeral arranged by the Xue Estate today, so who would come to rescue them from helplessness and despair?

"Please make way."

A voice came from beyond the gate.

Zhou Tong's body went rigid.

The officials of the Department for Purging Officials turned their heads as one, thinking, someone dared to come?

"Just what's going on with you people? What are you doing by blocking up some other person's gate?"

A voice belonging to a young woman immediately followed.

Zhou Tong slowly turned and gazed at the gate, his eyes narrowing.

He wanted to conceal the true emotions in his heart, and he also found the scene outside the gate rather blinding.

Many youths had arrived on the street.

This group contained both male and female students. Some had quick-witted eyes, some were honest and simple, some looked around proudly, and there were some with nervous expressions, but they all shared one attribute: they were all very young, their faces brimming with vitality.

A vitality that even all the varied emotions and countless different temperaments could not conceal.

This vitality was somewhat blinding, even a bit painful, to Zhou Tong, perhaps because he was already old.

In the capital, the places with the most youths and vitality were the Six Ivies.

The situation as of late had been very tense, so the gates of the Six Ivies had all been tightly shut. There was only one exception: the Orthodox Academy.

These youths were the students of the Orthodox Academy.

Chen Changsheng and Su Moyu stood at the very front of the crowd.

At this sight, the officials of the Department for Purging Officials and those onlookers on the street representing the various powers of the capital were all stunned.

Chen Changsheng had truly come.

He had come to pay respects to Xue Xingchuan.

He had come to slap the faces of Zhou Tong and the Imperial

Court.

Chen Changsheng walked towards the Xue Estate as if the officials of the Department for Purging Officials were not barring his path.

The youths of the Orthodox Academy followed.

The officials blocked the gate of the Xue Estate. If they did not give way, it was very likely that both sides would run into each other.

Running into each other was very likely to cause friction.

An increase in friction would result in a battle.

An escalating battle was a war.

Would the just-pacified capital once more fall into turmoil and unrest?

Zhou Tong said nothing, so the officials of the Department for Purging Officials had no intention of yielding.

The students of the Orthodox Academy also had no intention of halting their steps, because Chen Changsheng was still walking forward.

Zhou Tong had not expected Chen Changsheng to suddenly change his mind and come to the Xue Estate, but so what if he came?

At least half of the Great Zhou Imperial Court's secret forces were in his hand, an extremely frightening power.

Chen Changsheng's current status was very high, but he didn't have much strength. Right now, for instance, all that stood behind him were some ordinary students from the Orthodox Academy.

Before he ascended to the position of Pope, he had no means of moving the Orthodoxy's power.

With just the Orthodox Academy, how big of a storm could he possibly raise in the capital?

But...Zhou Tong creased his brow.

What if he had calculated wrongly? What if something unexpected were to occur? What if those princes wanted to move against Chen Changsheng?

Right when he was thinking about these things, the unexpected had already occurred.

The students of the Orthodox Academy met with the officials of the Department for Purging Officials, and then clashed. What followed was rightfully an exchanging of insults.

Clang! The sound of cold blades being unsheathed seemed particularly clear in front of the Xue Estate, as if wanting to slice apart the autumn breeze.

The officials were not taking the initiative to attack. Some people had unsheathed their blades to deter these youths.

They did not know that these youths, especially those young women amongst them, had been waiting for just this chance.

"Stop!" Zhou Tong shouted.

Those youths would naturally not listen to him.

The officials wanted to listen to him, but it was now impossible for them to obey.

Ten-some distinct ringing sounds resounded through the long street.

Countless streams of clear light crisscrossed through the autumn air, movingly sad and beautiful.

This was an incomparably pure sword intent with a most exquisite companion.

The clear and cold sword intent formed an invisible net that

spilled over those officials standing in front of the gate.

Zhou Tong himself could only choose to retreat in the face of these sword intents, let alone these officials.

With a series of groans and blood flying everywhere, ten-some officials of the Department for Purging Officials were slashed bloody by these sword intents and then sent flying.

In an instant, the stone lions standing guard at the Xue Estate's main gate were dyed in blood and ten-some blood-covered individuals appeared on the street. The scene reeked of blood.

No one could stand in front of the Xue Estate's gate, leaving a large open space.

Chen Changsheng walked in.

Ye Xiaolian and her ten-some senior sisters simultaneously sheathed their swords and followed behind him.

Chen Changsheng walked up to Zhou Tong.

With a clatter of metal from the surroundings, crossbows were readied.

The situation was very tense, but Zhou Tong's expression was calm.

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "The future Pope of my Great Zhou actually has to rely on the girls of Holy Maiden Peak for protection. If this fact were to get out, it would truly be somewhat shameful."

That which was able to so severely wound ten-some experts of the Department for Purging Officials in such a short time was naturally not the strength of the Orthodox Academy's students, but the famed sword array of South Stream Temple.

Chen Changsheng did not reply, but Ye Xiaolian did.

"Your officials of the Imperial Court weren't even able to beat girls like us. That's the truly shameful thing."

Zhou Tong did not care. Even if Chen Changsheng said it himself, no matter how humiliating it was, he would be able to endure it.

Because he had examined himself and found himself very mature, so mature that he was rotten to the core. Beneath his blood-colored gown was nothing but rotten pulp, so he had never been afraid of being defiled by others.

While the Pope had still not returned to the sea of stars, he would not give Chen Changsheng a single chance or excuse to launch an attack from.

Although he was not afraid of Chen Changsheng, just like how he

found the vitality of those youths to be somewhat blinding, he was not willing to let those youths join together their bravery.

After all, he was a very mature and powerful minister, a treacherous official who had achieved great success.

But Chen Changsheng's following two statements made it impossible for him to maintain his silence and the serenity in his heart.

Chen Changsheng was not deliberately humiliating him, as this was an answer that he truly wished to know.

This sort of composure and earnestness made Zhou Tong feel that even his own soul was exposed.

Because he could not answer Chen Changsheng's question.

Chen Changsheng said, "After I came to the capital, I often heard people say that if you were to die, only Xue Xingchuan would bury you."

This was a saying that had spread far and wide across the continent, and Zhou Tong had heard it more than once. His eyes narrowed into a thin line of cold light.

Chen Changsheng earnestly asked, "Now that you've murdered him, when you die in the future, who will bury your body?"

This was a very simple question.

A simple deduction was all that was required to reach a conclusion.

But Zhou Tong could not respond.

Because he did not want to have this sort of end.

No one wanted to have this sort of end.

To die without a place of burial.

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Chapter 689 – An Announcement with a Person

As the most famous treacherous minister, fawning sycophant, ruthless official, and thug in the past few years, perhaps in all of history, Zhou Tong had no friends.

Su Li also often said that he had no friends, but these were two different things.

Whether it was his schoolmates, colleagues, or even kindred spirits, they all wanted nothing more than for Zhou Tong to quickly die, an example being the princes who now held power in the Imperial Court.

If Zhou Tong really did die, there would naturally be no one to bury his body.

In fact, he had once had a friend who was willing to bury his body.

It was a pity that this friend had been personally murdered by him and had almost been denied a burial.

Thus, on this autumn day, the distant future was already visible: Zhou Tong would assuredly die without a place of burial.

He had no means of blaming other people or this world, as all this

had been created by his hands.

From this moment on, he would live in unease, frustration, and doubt, without ever seeing the tiniest glimmer of hope, until he finally died without a place of burial.

Chen Changsheng's question was not a curse, but a cool-headed analysis, a calm exposing of the facts.

This was terrifying.

The scene became abnormally quiet. Nobody spoke for a very long time, neither the officials of the Department for Purging Officials nor the students of the Orthodox Academy.

At this time, the only person able to break this silence was Zhou Tong himself.

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said with extreme solemnity and seriousness, "The esteemed master of the Dao will naturally take care of my body after I am gone."

In this short amount of time, this was the only thing he could think of that had a chance of shattering Chen Changsheng's conclusion.

He was currently Shang Xingzhou's dog. After he died, the master would surely have at least some sense of pity.

Chen Changsheng looked back at him and said, "I understand him more than you do. To him, every corpse has its uses. If a dog he raised died, he might eat its meat for nourishment, or divide it amongst the people of the town to gain a little reputation. If the dog ever bit someone before, he would not mind burning its bones to ashes to allow those still living to vent their anger."

Zhou Tong felt somewhat cold, and then somewhat hot, beginning to sweat within his blood-colored official's robe.

"Everyone must die," he said to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng knew that Zhou Tong was speaking of the Pope.

Zhou Tong immediately followed, "Then did you ever think about who would bury your body when the time comes?"

Without waiting for a response, he stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes and yelled, "Don't forget, you are just a plaything of the powerful, nothing more than a tool!"

Starting from 'The esteemed master of the Dao will naturally take care of my body after I am gone' and continuing to these three consecutive statements, he had truthfully been speaking a single question.

Chen Changsheng's question had touched upon Zhou Tong's

weakest point, and he began to feel uneasy, even somewhat fearful.

Chen Changsheng replied, "I don't know who will bury me. I only know that before I die, I will definitely kill you."

There was silence. Not even the birds cried out. Within and without the Xue Estate, only the rustling of the autumn breeze could be heard.

This was also not a threat, as when he made this statement, his expression was very calm.

Of course, he was not making a joke either, as not a hint of a smile could be seen on his face. It was a very earnest statement.

This was an announcement.

Chen Changsheng was announcing to the world: No matter what, Zhou Tong will assuredly die before me.

Zhou Tong would die a violent death.

It was in addition to the previous question.

And his statement was that he would certainly have Zhou Tong die without a place of burial.

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A deathly stillness gripped the Xue Estate.

The officials of the Department for Purging Officials had abnormally ugly expressions, while the students of the Orthodox Academy were rather nervous.

No matter what, Zhou Tong was a powerful minister of the court. Not even the Pope or the Emperor would make such an announcement.

Chen Changsheng's making such an announcement might have allowed him to vent his emotions, but what sort of turmoil would it invite?

To him, this was not a problem. He did not want to use this announcement to vent his anger. He had very calmly and coolly stated his thoughts. As for what other people thought, he didn't much care.

After saying these words, he walked over to Madam Xue.

As for the young lady and butler of the Xue Estate who had been captured by the officials, they had naturally been rescued.

Zhou Tong stared at his back and emotionlessly asked, "Can you kill me?"

Chen Changsheng did not stop or turn around. "On that night, I already killed you once."

"Do you perhaps think that you inspire awe with your devotion to justice? That these nonsensical words of yours have weight and power? 'Following your heart'—just how many times are you prepared to repeat that tired old phrase?"

Zhou Tong ended, "No one will think the same as you, just as no one will come to this place."

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The facts proved Zhou Tong to be incorrect.

Not long after Chen Changsheng arrived, the Xue Estate welcomed another guest.

This person had a very special status which not even Zhou Tong had any power over. At the same time, his visit was very surprising.

The important personage who had come to pay respects to Xue

Xingchuan was the Prince of Zhongshan, Chen Sixuan.

This was a prince who had suffered countless humiliations at the hands of Tianhai's government. He naturally had no good feelings for Chen Changsheng, but this was even more the case for Zhou Tong.

He lit a stick of incense for Xue Xingchuan, glanced at Chen Changsheng, and then spit all over Zhou Tong's face.

Soon after, the Minister of Rites arrived, followed by several major figures of the Orthodoxy, and then Tianhai Shengxue finally arrived.

Many people noticed that there was a faint wound on Tianhai Shengxue's face, most likely the result of the conflict that arose when he was preparing to leave the estate earlier.

Every important personage that appeared at the Xue Estate was another slap to Zhou Tong's face.

No matter how much Zhou Tong could endure it, he could not continue to remain here.

Just when he was leaving, he saw Prince Chen Liu.

"If I were you, I would definitely silently pray for Chen Changsheng to smoothly ascend to the seat of the Pope."

Prince Chen Liu seriously advised, "Or else, he will definitely make those words a reality."

In the past, on the Divine Avenue of the Li Palace, Archbishop Mei Lisha had announced to the entire world that Chen Changsheng would take the first rank of the first banner in the Grand Examination. In the end, Chen Changsheng had really managed to do it.

Today, in front of the Xue Estate's funeral hall, Chen Changsheng had announced to the entire world that he would assuredly have Zhou Tong die without a place of burial...

"There are many people who want to kill me, but I'm still alive after so many years. Why?"

Zhou Tong laughed, his smile rather sinister. "Because I've never regarded myself as a human. I've always known that I'm just a dog."

Dogs had masters.

To strike a dog was to strike at its master.

And he had always been a dog that was able to find the strongest master.

"Those mad, hot-blooded young ones who have had their minds purged of intelligence by youth have always wanted to kill me in these past few years, but were they able to do it?"

"As for those people who have the ability to kill me, could they be so blind that they can't see who my master is?"

"Chen Changsheng can talk all he wants, but he still won't dare attack me. Am I wrong?"

Zhou Tong smiled, the sinister aura in his smile gradually transforming into ridicule and exhaustion, both to this world and himself.

He spoke the truth, as he himself was a cultivation expert at the upper level of Star Condensation, while at his command were countless assassins and experts. Those who were able to kill him had to be true experts of the continent. And true experts had never been lonesome souls. They had their own sects, families, disciples—many people that they needed to watch over. An example of this was Zhu Luo. As an expert of the Divine Domain, killing Zhou Tong would not be too difficult a task, but in these past few years, he had never even attempted this feat.

Those young and courageous enough to come and kill Zhou Tong did not have the ability to do so.

Those who had the ability were certainly experienced and weathered by the trials of time, mature and composed. They knew the principle of taking the big picture into consideration.

There were very few people like Chen Changsheng.

And even he could not touch Zhou Tong if he had any plans of sitting upon the Pope's throne.

In Zhou Tong's view, this announcement was just the vicious words of a youth.

Besides Chen Changsheng, who else could there be?

Those who had the ability to kill him would never be so naive and childish.

Thus, he was always safe.

At this moment, a large carriage transporting a crabapple tree entered the capital.

The roots of this crabapple tree had been preserved very well, wrapped in the freshest of soil.

The attending redcoated cavalry waved their horse whips to drive away pedestrians while they cursed at the time.

On the side of the official road, a man was calmly watching these scenes in silence.

His blue clothes had been washed until they had begun to fade, starched until they had become very inflexible.

His two eyebrows drooped downwards, making him seem somewhat poverty-stricken.

He looked like an accountant who had had much of his salary deducted.

And also like a worn-out blade wrapped in rough cloth.

Chapter 690 – Thoughts without Evil

Edited by : Michyrr

The once-deserted gate and courtyard of the Xue Estate were still not very lively, but at least some people had visited, and they had all been important figures. In front of the coffin, the Prince of Zhongshan had just very casually nodded and then left. On the other hand, the Minister of Rites had very seriously lit a stick of incense and then whispered a few words. No one knew what he had said.

In the eastern courtyard, a quiet room had been set up. Chen Changsheng, Su Moyu, Prince Chen Liu, and Tianhai Shengxue were seated in chairs within this room.

The four of them were all very young. Tianhai Shengxue, the oldest, was only thirty-some years old.

Chen Changsheng looked at the wound on Tianhai Shengxue's face and wanted to say something.

Tianhai Shengxue spoke first.

After that year's Grand Examination, the grudge between the Orthodox Academy and Tianhai Shengxue had been resolved. In private, they had even formed a mutual understanding unbeknownst to anyone else. That mutual understanding and the promise made back then now seemed very frail against the grand backdrop of the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, unable to

withstand a single blow. Nevertheless, the two sides had once had a mutual understanding.

Moreover, just as was said before, they were all still young.

Youths spoke to each other with far fewer platitudes, spoke much more directly.

"You should also be well aware that these important figures that came to the Xue Estate today wish to use your momentum to probe at or confirm things in the Imperial Court."

Tianhai Shengxue continued, "The master of the Dao holds supreme authority in the Imperial Court and requires Zhou Tong's survival as proof. At least up until this point, no one had dared to challenge this, but I believe that with the passage of time, our fathers will not be so willing to remain this obedient."

His father was Tianhai Chenwu and Prince Chen Liu's father was the Prince of Xiang, both truly powerful figures of the Great Zhou Dynasty.

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning. After a period of silence, he said, "Nobody knows how long such a time would be."

"You can't randomly step on a path when you don't know what it looks like ahead. It's easy to walk into crossroads this way."

Prince Chen Liu saw his expression and earnestly advised, "Any

matter must consider the general situation first. Your becoming Pope is the general situation more important than anything else, is worthy of patiently waiting for."

Chen Changsheng did not speak. He had a different opinion of this matter.

He understood his teacher more than anyone else, including the Pope.

He had lived in Xining Village's old temple for fourteen years. The middle-aged Daoist had been both teacher and father to him, but now that he carefully thought about it, neither he nor Yu Ren had ever seen the true colors of the middle-aged Daoist. They had only seen the corner of a peak through the thick mist, a thin sliver of blue sky on an overcast day, a single flower growing by a stream.

Now that he had experienced so many things, these many sights and fragments of memory gradually began to take shape. These seemingly objectiveless details—the flower by the stream, the mountain in the mist, the blue sky behind the clouds, the Daoist scriptures within the temple—had actually contained details overflowing with information and were now forming into a true picture: his teacher, Shang Xingzhou.

The Pope wished to pass the Orthodoxy into Chen Changsheng's hands. He believed that he could use the might of the Li Palace and his own awe-inspiring reputation to ensure that at least no one within the Orthodoxy would oppose this matter after he returned to the sea of stars. Thus, as long as the Orthodoxy was internally stable and united, the Imperial Court could not meddle in this

affair.

But Chen Changsheng knew that this matter would assuredly not develop in this fashion. He was extremely sure that the day his martial uncle the Pope returned to the sea of stars would be the same day that his teacher moved against him. He might be killed, or, like the little Black Dragon, he would be imprisoned forever in an abyss that would never see the light of day.

Regardless of the result, it was not a result he desired.

Tianhai Shengxue seemed to sense something and said, "If you really think that something big will occur, you should start making preparations now."

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "All preparations are rather meaningless."

It was just like that night—after the Imperial Design had lost effectiveness, the entire situation in the capital hinged on the outcome of the battle on the Mausoleum of Books.

The history of the continent had always been decided by the experts of the Divine Domain.

Between the Divine and the mortal was a gorge that could not be crossed.

No matter how incredible Chen Changsheng's talent in

cultivation, it was impossible for him to cross this gorge in the short span of several dozen days.

"You should leave."

Prince Chen Liu had a different opinion than Tianhai Shengxue. "Take advantage of the fact that His Holiness is compelling your teacher not to move...this is your best and final opportunity."

Su Moyu glanced at Chen Changsheng.

In the Orthodox Academy, he had once made a similar proposal.

Chen Changsheng did not reply. He knew that it was impossible for him to leave.

Tianhai Shengxue departed, but before he left the room, he said, "In a few more days, the celebration will begin."

Many events had taken place this autumn. The Tianhai Empress had returned to the sea of stars and the Demon Lord had descended to his death in the abyss.

Some other events were about to take place. The only one that could be discussed on an equal level with the previous two was the confluence of the north and south.

After a few days, the celebration over the confluence of the north

and south would begin. Based on what was discussed in the spring, the White Emperor couple might come to preside over the festivities.

Chen Changsheng understood what Tianhai Shengxue wanted to bring notice to.

Luoluo might also return to the capital.

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Zhou Tong returned to the alley of the Northern Military Department.

He stood at the base of the courtyard's wall, his hands held behind him as he stared into the deep tree hole. His expression was apathetic as he silently waited for the return of the crabapple tree.

A mournful bird cry suddenly rang out in the autumn sky. He and several subordinate officials raised their heads, only seeing a black silhouette strengthlessly descend from the sky.

It was a Red Falcon, one of the best birds at enduring long-distance flights. In one night, it could cross one thousand mountains and ten thousand rivers and still not feel tired.

This Red Falcon was only returning from the south, yet it was exhausted to the point of death.

Some major event had assuredly occurred in the south.

The Mount Li Sword Sect? The Qiushan clan? Or was it... Scholartree Manor?

Zhou Tong's eyebrows rose.

A subordinate hurriedly came forward and reported on the urgent news from the south.

Wang Po had left Scholartree Manor.

The spies of the Department for Purging Officials that had been following him the entire time had been thrown off two days ago at the Qing River and had lost track of Wang Po.

No one knew where Wang Po was going or where he was now.

Zhou Tong stared at his subordinate but did not speak.

With some hesitation, the subordinate said, "He...might be coming to the capital."

Zhou Tong's expression subtly changed. After a pause, he suddenly said, "I need to enter the palace."

The subordinates were somewhat stunned at these words. If Wang Po is truly coming to the capital, shouldn't Your Excellency be sending men to stop or kill him? Why is there a need to so urgently enter the palace?

"Are you all deaf?"

Zhou Tong's face was rather pale, his voice somewhat shrill.

He needed to urgently enter the palace because he was currently very uneasy, even somewhat afraid.

Only in the Imperial Palace under the watchful gaze of the esteemed master of the Dao would he feel safe.

He was very sure that Wang Po would come to the capital.

He was very sure of what Wang Po was coming to do.

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Upon returning to the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng also learned of this news.

Su Moyu was very perplexed, asking, "What is he coming to the capital for? To pay respects to Xue Xingchuan?"

No one dared to bury Xue Xingchuan and no one dared to pay him homage. At this time, if Wang Po were to appear, it would be very much in line with the common people's impression of him.

Chen Changsheng did not believe this was the case. He knew that Wang Po had not come to pay respects or for anything else.

Wang Po had come to the capital to accomplish one task.

He had come to kill.

To kill Zhou Tong.

Chapter 691 – A Blade with a Dao

The news that Wang Po might be coming to the capital spread very quickly and caused much consternation.

After Su Li's departure, Wang Po had become the greatest idol in the minds of the young cultivators of the continent.

He was not as confident and easygoing as Su Li, nor did he have a particular bearing like Su Li, yet his aloof and emotionless self had attracted the reverence of others. He was similar to Su Li, however, in that he was a cultivating genius rarely seen in a hundred years. He had once compelled Snow-Treading Xun Mei to shut himself up in the Mausoleum of Books and he had never given Painted Armor Xiao Zhang or Liang Wangsun a chance to surpass him. There were many experts below the Divine Domain, such as Xue Xingchuan, yet it was him, ranked first on the Proclamation of Liberation, that was publicly acknowledged as the strongest of the lot.

Moreover, compared to Su Li, he was more in accordance with the commonly accepted definition of a hero, an example of this being his actions in that dark rain within Xunyang City.

Most importantly, the aura of a legend was too thick about him. As the sole descendant of a fallen clan, he had grown up in the vilest of conditions, far more arduous than any other cultivating genius. In the Wenshui Tang clan, he had played the part of an accountant for several years, and then he began to travel the world. In the space of ten-some years, he had set up Scholartree Manor in the south and become a wealthy power.

Just like Su Moyu, the greatest question people had after learning this news was this: Why was he coming to the capital, and what was he prepared to do?

The story of Wang Po of Tianliang was a story known by the entire continent. As the last descendant of the Wang clan, he had chosen Wang Po to be his name. The meaning of this name was known without needing to ask, and perhaps it was for this reason that the Imperial Court had always been wary of him and had attempted to suppress him countless times before. He was also aware of this, so he very rarely appeared in the capital.

Wang Po's coming to the capital was naturally a major event.

In the past, even if he did come to the capital, he would come without a sound and in a very low-key fashion, such as the night of Xun Mei's death.

Now, the situation and time were both completely different. He wanted to enter the capital in a low-key fashion, but it was impossible for him to do so.

That night on the Mausoleum of Books, Zhu Luo had pushed himself to attack while heavily injured, opening this majestic campaign of the entire world against Tianhai, paying with the death of his body and the vanishing of his soul. He had done this all to extract a promise from Shang Xingzhou, who represented the new government: Let the Wang clan never rise again.

The Wang clan was precisely Wang Po.

If Wang Po remained in the south and quietly stood guard over Scholartree Manor, then with the mutual protection of the Mount Li Sword Sect and the collective voice of the other powers of the south, the Imperial Court would not have been able to touch him. After all, with the confluence of the north and south in the background, some harmony had to be maintained on the surface. However, if he were to leave Scholartree Manor and enter the capital alone, the Imperial Court would not let this chance slip by.

No matter how strong he was, he was no match for the Great Zhou Imperial Court.

If he appeared in the capital, the Imperial Court had numerous methods to kill him.

No one understood why he wanted to come.

Chen Changsheng understood, because he had once endured a storm together with Wang Po in Xunyang City.

He deeply admired this expert. In the past two years, he had applied some of what he had learned from Wang Po to his own behavior, a matter which had once deeply concerned Tang Thirty-Six.

Besides Chen Changsheng, there was one other person that clearly understood why Wang Po had come.

It was Zhou Tong himself.

Consequently, once he learned of this news, the first thing he did was enter the palace and request a meeting with Shang Xingzhou.

Not long after he entered the palace, the capital once more became tense. From the military to the Ministry of Justice, from the Department for Purging Officials to the City Gate Department, countless experts and assassins began to sweep through the streets of the capital.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat concerned. After a night of contemplation, he took a chance and had the people of the Orthodoxy assist with the search, but they turned up nothing.

The Imperial Court's search was also fruitless.

No one had been able to find Wang Po.

He had just vanished.

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As time slowly passed, the autumn began to settle in.

The celebration of the confluence of north and south was about to take place. The Great Zhou Imperial Court had made many preparations. The famous buildings of the capital were all repaired to be like new, and even the Mausoleum of Books was cleaned up.

The mood in the capital was still not completely cheerful and relaxed. The ripples from the coup of the Mausoleum of Books had yet to fade, the Orthodox Academy still refused to bring out the Divine Empress's body, and Wang Po had still not been found.

At this time, the Orthodox Academy received two letters. One letter was from Holy Maiden Peak, written personally by Xu Yourong.

She had returned to South Stream Temple. Logically speaking, she should be summoning back the disciples of South Stream Temple, and she did mention this in the letter, but she still left eighteen disciples for Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng was well aware that these female disciples had a grasp over the soul of the South Stream Temple sword array. If they displayed their full strength, Chen Changsheng was safe as long as it was not an expert of the Divine Domain or a grand army attacking.

The other letter was from Wenshui and was personally written by Tang Thirty-Six.

Besides Chen Changsheng, no one knew the contents of this

letter, not even Su Moyu.

Su Moyu and the teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy only knew that after Chen Changsheng read the letter, he became very depressed and fell into a long period of silence.

Golden ginkgo leaves covered the ground of New North Bridge.

Nearby was the Imperial Palace. Lantern lights shone from this place, and as they shone onto the ground, it was like the setting sun had returned.

Standing under the tree and seeing this sight, Chen Changsheng silently thought, the setting sun can't come back once it sets under the mountains, and it seems that departed friends also won't get a chance to come back.

The entire world seemed to be painted gold, making the color of the well seem even more serene and deep.

When the lights from the Imperial Palace momentarily dimmed, Chen Changsheng's figure vanished from the tree. A breeze stirred around the edge of the well. As the golden leaves were curled up by this wind, they presented a beautiful sight.

The ginkgo leaves outside the Imperial City were a famous sight of the capital.

Very few people knew that outside the capital was a Daoist

temple called Tanzhe. There was a similar sight there that was perhaps even more beautiful. (TN: Tanzhe Temple is an actual Buddhist temple located on the outskirts of Beijing. The name literally translates to 'Pool and Mulberry Temple', referencing the pool within the temple and the mulberry trees growing in its environs. It is home to two particularly old ginkgo trees, around 1000 years old.)

In the center of the courtyard at the back of this temple grew an extremely old ginkgo tree, said to have been planted by Emperor Taizong himself. In the autumn, this ancient tree was covered in golden leaves, like a golden cloud or a firework. Beneath the tree were thick piles of leaves, a golden cloud descended to earth. If viewed from a distance, it looked like a golden waterfall.

In the depths of the golden ginkgo leaves was a stone table. By the table was a stone stool, and a person was sitting on this stool. He was not drinking tea, but comprehending the blade.

The entire continent knew that he had come to the capital and countless people were seeking him out within it, but they had failed. This was because although he had come to the capital, he had not entered the city.

If people were to know of this, they would assuredly be astounded, as this was completely different from his past behavior and conduct.

Everyone believed that since he had come to the capital, he would certainly enter, as this was very much like his path of the blade, straight and true.

Zhou Tong had also thought this way, but turned out to be wrong.

Wang Po had already stayed in Tanzhe Temple for eleven days.

He would spend each day quietly seated under the ginkgo tree.

He was comprehending the blade, not practicing the blade. The metal blade remained in its sheath, and the sheath sat on his knees.

The ancient tree continued to shed leaves, covering the earth. It seemed particularly pure and exuded a dazzling beauty, so much so that it was difficult to imagine what it looked like beneath the leaves.

Those golden leaves also naturally fell on his body, accumulating on his clothes and gradually covering his sheath, so much so that it was difficult to imagine the edge of the blade within the sheath.

The Dao of Wang Po's blade, in this world of yellow leaves, faintly began to transform.

Chapter 692 – An Autumn with a Rain

As time passed, the autumn deepened, and the sky filled with falling leaves was exhausted. The ancient tree within Tanzhe Temple was left with only bare branches and a naked trunk.

Fallen leaves still covered the path entering the mountains, but after a session of autumn rain that had begun last night, there was not a hint of beauty left within them. They only stirred vexation, like bedding that was thoroughly soaked.

Drenched fallen leaves had at least some benefits, and one of these was that someone walking on them wouldn't make much noise. Under the cover of the overcast sky and the threads of rain, several dozen experts of the Great Zhou military and an even greater number of assassins and spies from the Department for Purging Officials tread upon the soaked fallen leaves, noiselessly crossing the mountain path and sneaking into the autumn forest circling the mountain.

The paths leading out of the mountains from Tanzhe Temple were completely under control. No one would be able to leave.

There was a rustling sound, somewhat crisp and dry. It was like someone was walking across the golden leaves as they were several days ago, their steps crumbling numerous dry leaves.

It sounded like crumbling leaves, but it was the autumn wind passing through the rain and incessantly blowing against a paper mask.

A man was walking on the mountain path, with a white paper on his face, obscuring his nose and mouth. Only at his eyes were two black holes punched in the paper, making him seem abnormally terrifying.

Painted Armor Xiao Zhang.

The rain falling from the sky seemed to avoid his body of its own accord. The white paper was clean and dry, without a single drop of water on it.

In this generation of blooming wildflowers, countless cultivation geniuses had appeared, tyrannical and overbearing experts. Amongst them, he was one of the most terrifying and most powerful.

Like Xun Mei, he had been undefeated his entire life, with one sole exception: Wang Po. He had never beaten Wang Po, not even once. Whether at Boiling Stone Summit or the Proclamation of Liberation, he could only ever be ranked second.

But he was never scared or discouraged. He continued to issue challenges to Wang Po, continued to lose every fight. Even going insane and almost dying had been unable to shake his will.

To be beneath only one man seemed to already be quite an outstanding rank, but he did not want to accept it.

Today, in the dreary autumn rain, he was walking upon the mountain path naturally so he could fight Wang Po again.

He had never imagined that Wang Po might not accept, because the gathering of so many experts of the Imperial Court had surrounded Tanzhe Temple. If Wang Po wanted to leave, he would first have to defeat him.

To defeat him once more, or be defeated.

The autumn wind blew against the white paper, rustling like dry leaves.

The autumn rain fell upon the mountain path, but the soaked leaves could make no noise.

Xiao Zhang was not able to walk to Tanzhe Temple, because a person had appeared in front of him.

Treading on soaked leaves truly would not make any noise. In this noiseless fashion, this person had passed through the several blockades set up on the mountain path, even concealing their presence from Xiao Zhang's perception.

Just who was this person that they were actually this strong?

This person was clothed in black. He let the rain soak him as he exuded an extremely cold and tough aura.

His clothes, his face, the lines on his shoulder, and the hands he held behind him all seemed to be cast from iron.

Standing in front of the mountain path, he cut off the autumn rain from the ground, the autumn wind from the paper, Tanzhe Temple from the rest of the world.

He was just like a wall, and not a wall made from earth or brick, but from iron, a wall that not even wind could pass through.

Xiao Zhang knew who this person was. The black holes on the white paper seemed to become even deeper and more serene, but faint flames of madness could be seen within.

"You want to stop me?" he asked the iron wall that was the man before him.

The person expressionlessly looked back, seeming to regard Xiao Zhang's question as extremely silly and not worth answering.

The entire world knew that Painted Armor Xiao Zhang was a true madman, his conduct abnormally violent and unbridled. No one dared to lightly offend him, much less view him with contempt.

Yet this person had done so, and shockingly, although the intent to fight in Xiao Zhang's deep and serene eyes intensified, he ultimately...did not strike.

Xiao Zhang recalled that rumor. Given this man's relationship with the Great Western Continent, there was simply no reason for him to attack Wang Po. He asked, "If you don't, why do you stand in front of me?"

The person answered, "Since I've come, the rest of you naturally have to leave. You are not his opponent, and I don't want you to put him on his guard."

Xiao Zhang became utterly furious, the white paper on his face rustling in response.

Suddenly, the autumn wind ceased to rise from his face. He fell silent, because he understood this person's intentions.

"This is not fair to him," Xiao Zhang said, staring the man in the eyes.

The man had clearly come to Tanzhe Temple to fight with Wang Po.

Xiao Zhang said that this was not fair to Wang Po.

This meant that in his view, this person's strength was far above Wang Po's, and logically speaking, they should not have lowered themselves to fight against Wang Po.

Wang Po was at the top of the Proclamation of Liberation, the strongest of all experts beneath the Divine Domain in the hearts of

the people. Just who in the world would have enough strength to be able to easily defeat him?

If there truly was someone, it could only be one of those powerful figures of the Divine Domain, those old monsters that could be counted with a pair of hands.

Just who was this person? Which member of the Storms of the Eight Directions? Or was it some lofty person who had concealed themselves from the world for many years?

Xiao Zhang knew who this person was, so he said that it was unfair, but this did not mean that he was afraid.

He could almost see a little into the future: Wang Po collapsed under the ancient tree, his body covered in blood.

He found this somewhat difficult to accept.

Just like Xun Mei, he had spent his entire life attempting to surpass Wang Po. He found it impossible to accept that before he succeeded, Wang Po would be killed.

At this moment, he was overcome with the intense desire to stop this man.

This person could kill Wang Po, and Wang Po was stronger than him, yet he still wanted to stop this person. No matter how one looked at it, this was an insane way of thinking.

He had always been a very insane man.

Rain fell on his spear, soaking his hand.

It was Xiao Zhang's hand, clenched and forceful.

"And what right do any of you have to speak to me of fairness?"

The man glanced at Xiao Zhang, his expression apathetic as if looking upon nothing.

His iron wall of shoulder, washed in the autumn rain, seemed to have been polished tens of thousands of times. It shone with a metallic luster. Then, it began to reveal its edge.

A grunt came out of the white paper.

The autumn rain washed the spear and the fingers grasping the spear grew slightly pale.

In the end, Xiao Zhang had still not struck.

Or perhaps, he had been unable to strike.

He could only watch as the man walked through the rain into Tanzhe Temple.

Like an iron wall, shining with a cold light.

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[Tie Shu](#), one of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

He was born in the Great Western Continent. When he was young, he for some reason fled into the sea and attempted to cross the vast ocean. He nearly died, but was fortunately rescued by a person on the shore. That person was called Guan Xingke.

In the past ten years, he had been wandering about the Southern Sea, comprehending the Heavenly Dao. Now, he had finally returned.

He comprehended the Heavenly Dao, cultivated in the fleshly body, and was incomparably powerful.

'The blooming iron tree' was equally renowned as Bie Yanghong's small red flower, but no one had ever personally seen it.

He entered Tanzhe Temple.

The ancient tree had already shed all its leaves. The remaining yellowed leaves on the ground soaked in the rainwater.

Tie Shu walked to the stone stool, sat down, and closed his eyes.

Just like Wang Po had done over these past few days.

(TN: Tie Shu literally translates to 'Iron Tree'. In Chinese, this refers specifically to the plant *Cycas revoluta*. This plant is known for its extremely slow maturation, only beginning to bloom with flowers after 15-20 years. In the past, there was an idiom 'The iron tree blooms every one thousand years', used to indicate that something was an extremely rare occurrence or very difficult to realize. In reality, however, given the proper conditions, *Cycas revoluta* can bloom every year.)

Chapter 693 – Wind with a Message

After some time, Tie Shu opened his eyes. A streak of harshness flashed across his eyes, and then a tinge of perplexity. He seemed to be in a particularly complex mood.

Under the ancient tree, amongst the yellowed leaves, upon the stone stool, he sensed the Qi that Wang Po had left over the past few days. To his surprise, Wang Po's path of the blade had grown even more profound.

At Wang Po's level of cultivation, wanting to advance a single step more was incredibly difficult. Yet this person had been able to advance so far in such a short amount of time... In Xunyang City when Wang Po was facing Zhu Luo, although his blade had been powerful, he had not been able to find a single chance. Now, after several days of quiet comprehension in Tanzhe Temple, the situation was completely different.

If Wang Po were allowed to continue advancing, no one could know when he would cross that threshold.

For the first time, Tie Shu felt pressure.

Then, his killing intent intensified.

Neither he nor the Imperial Court would allow for the day to come when Wang Po's path of the blade finally reached completion.

He got up from the stone stool and gazed at Tanzhe Temple, quietly sensing the flow of Qi in the heavens and earth.

There was someone in the temple with a masterly cultivation, only a little way from his own cultivation level.

He began walking there, and the soaked leaves crumbled under his shoes into the finest of threads, looking just like blooming chrysanthemums.

The autumn wind broke through the curtain of rain and pushed upon the door to Tanzhe Temple. He was still ten-some zhang away from its threshold.

Before the cold autumn wind could run rampant, it was matched by two clear and light breezes. These two breezes came from a pair of sleeves.

The person in the temple was not Wang Po, but Mao Qiuyu.

The gate of the fence running along the side of the temple was pushed upon, and Daoist Baishi walked out of the rain.

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan came respectively from the east and the west.

In the autumn rain, the figures of many cardinals could be seen

flickering in and out of the forest.

Four Prefects of the Orthodoxy, each holding a precious treasure, led numerous cardinals of profound cultivation to tightly encircle Tanzhe Temple.

This was truly an impressive array of forces.

Killing an expert of the Divine Domain required such an array of forces.

Tie Shu stared at Mao Qiuyu, his eyes slowly narrowing. His killing intent did not lessen in the slightest. On the contrary, it only became more terrifying.

The Li Palace had truly moved. Did they want to protect Wang Po, or were they actually taking this chance to kill him?

He was well aware that if it was the latter, then even if he was able to escape with his life today, he would have to pay a most grievous price.

He extended his hands into the rain and allowed its cold waters to unceasingly wash them.

He stared as Mao Qiuyu slowly walked out of the temple, and impassively asked, "Is this the decree of His Holiness the Pope?"

Mao Qiuyu did not directly answer his question. Instead, he looked into the distance.

Tie Shu had already sensed this presence, which is why he had asked the question.

In the distant mountains, the garish red and yellow colors brought by the autumn had long been dulled by the cold bath of the rain.

At some point, a princely carriage had appeared on the edge of a cliff.

The Prince of Xiang had personally come.

The Imperial Court's plan to murder Wang Po might have become the Li Palace's plan to enclose and kill Tie Shu.

If that princely carriage had not appeared on the cliff, if the rumbling thunder of a great army could not be heard from behind the mountain.

No matter who this scheme was aimed at, it was already revealed.

"His Holiness wanted me to ask you a question." Mao Qiuyu gazed upon Tie Shu and asked, "Did all of you forget the oath you swore to the starry sky?"

Many years ago, the Pope had led the other experts of the Divine Domain to draw upon the starry sky and establish an oath.

The contents of the oath were this: the benefit of humanity took first priority in everything, so it was absolutely forbidden to move against those cultivating geniuses who bore the future and hope of humanity.

Wang Po was naturally at the top of this list.

Back in Xunyang City, Zhu Luo had wielded his sword against him and could already be considered to have broken the oath, but he had still been able to find some excuse.

His sword had stabbed at Su Li.

It was just that Wang Po insisted on standing in front of Su Li.

But today? Tie Shu had come to Tanzhe Temple, bringing with him the autumn rain. He had clearly come to kill Wang Po, so what excuse or reason would he be able to find?

Would he be able to answer the question the Pope had asked Mao Qiuyu to pose?

Tie Shu did not answer.

Mao Qiuyu noted, "Since you cannot answer, do not touch Wang

Po."

Tie Shu's gaze grew colder. The rain washed his hands even whiter and purer, like two white lotus flowers in the rain.

This was a sign that he was very angry.

Man cannot live well for a hundred days unbroken; a flower cannot retain its beauty for one thousand days.

(TN: The author has chosen to flip the time periods of this saying. Usually it is man that cannot live well for a thousand days and a flower that cannot retain its beauty for one hundred. The meaning of the original saying is that no good thing lasts forever.)

He began to derisively laugh.

The Pope's days were already running short.

"His Holiness also wanted me to say to you..."

Mao Qiuyu seemed to know what Tie Shu was thinking as he calmly declared, "If, after he returns to the sea of stars, you persist in moving against Wang Po, the Li Palace will exterminate your entire clan."

If one said that the Li Palace was a sort of sect, then it would certainly be the most powerful sect in the world, because it was the Orthodoxy.

No cultivator could directly oppose the Orthodoxy.

Not even someone as powerful as Tie Shu.

Not even the once-head of the Storms of the Eight Directions, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, who had controlled the terrifying organization that was the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

Of course, an expert of the Divine Domain might not be able to resist the Li Palace, but they would also be very difficult to kill, as long as they did not fall into such a heavy encirclement as one did today.

However, one cultivated the Dao in isolation, yet there were very few cultivators that were truly alone.

They would have family, relatives, friends, schoolmates, clansmen, comrades.

After Mao Qiuyu made this declaration, the temple was plunged into silence.

'Exterminate your entire clan.'

These four words were just like Tie Shu: unyielding, cold, and giving off the intimidating scent of metal.

Tie Shu looked back at him and said, "All of you should be well aware that Wang Po has come to the capital to kill."

Mao Qiuyu's expression did not change. "If he kills someone, he has broken the laws of Zhou, and there will be officials of the Imperial Court to punish him."

Many people turned to that princely carriage on the distant cliff.

The Prince of Xiang had not left his carriage.

Tie Shu laughed with ridicule and derision.

Mao Qiuyu's statements represented the stance of the Li Palace.

This stance was very cold.

"He's come to kill, but none of you dare. I haven't killed anyone yet, so why does His Holiness care?"

"Because you have the intention."

"This is unfair."

Mao Qiuyu did not answer Tie Shu, instead turning to leave the mountain.

Linghai Zhiwang and the others followed.

The Pope truly had no desire to kill Tie Shu.

Just as it had in front of the Orthodox Academy, the Li Palace only wanted to display its strength.

The so-called escort was just using one's blade to bar the way. The so-called naval convoy was just sailing a boat in front. Without needing to unsheathe the blade or ram the boat, it was enough.

Tie Shu watched as the people of the Orthodoxy departed into the autumn rain, the corner of his eyes twitching.

All of these people were powerful figures of the Orthodoxy, but none of them was a match for him. Yet he did not dare strike them.

It was truly unfair.

Just as he had earlier said to Xiao Zhang on the mountain path.

Before the Pope and the Orthodoxy, what right did he have to talk about fairness?

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The yellow leaves had all fallen and the cold began to deepen.

This year's winter seemed to come to the capital somewhat earlier. Based on the calendar, it was still late autumn, but snow had already fallen quite a few times.

The people living at New North Bridge felt it all the more keenly. They hid in their homes and constantly rubbed their hands while cursing the weather.

No one noticed that this harsh winter was related to that abandoned well.

A cold wind was constantly blowing from the well, whooshing like someone playing a flute, or like a weeping that cried tears of joy.

Chapter 694 – Clouds without Intention

No true battle had taken place at Tanzhe Temple, but the dangers hidden within had been more frightening than the vast majority of the world's battles.

On that day of autumn rain, the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy had moved far too many experts, so it was simply impossible to conceal news of this event.

The people very quickly found out that Tie Shu had returned from the Southern Sea, and they even knew that he had come to the capital and wanted to kill Wang Po. Simultaneously, they also confirmed Wang Po's objective: he had come to kill Zhou Tong. Most importantly, the people finally confirmed that the fissure between the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy was growing deeper and deeper. A major problem could occur at any time.

In the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, these two great powers had worked together with complete sincerity. Just a few days later, they were now running against each other, a most incomprehensible matter. Now, however, everyone clearly understood why.

Because of Chen Changsheng.

No one noticed the cold wind rising up from the bottom of the New North Bridge, nor did anyone know what Chen Changsheng was thinking.

He never left the Orthodox Academy. He quietly sat by the window in the library, reading books, not looking out the window, not asking about what happened beyond it.

Many people speculated that the Divine Empress's body had probably been buried by him in the Orthodox Academy, but no one had any proof.

Even a powerful figure like Eunuch Lin had retreated in low spirits, and the Li Palace had clearly displayed its stance, so who would dare forcefully intrude into the Orthodox Academy to conduct a search?

The Imperial Court did not continue to send down decrees asking for the Orthodox Academy to bring out the Divine Empress's body, but everyone knew that this matter would not come to an end like this.

Many people did not understand why Chen Changsheng wanted to act this way, including many important personages of the Orthodoxy, such as Daoist Baishi.

If it was just for the sake of the right to inherit the Orthodoxy, then with the Pope's decree, he only needed to choose the appropriate moment to display his goodwill to the Imperial Palace, and the Imperial Palace was certain to withdraw its original plans.

But he did not receive a decree, nor did he request a decree to enter the palace, nor did he have anyone pass a message to the Imperial Palace. He had remained silent.

At present, the entire world knew that he was a descendant of the exiled imperials, that his body held the blood of the Chen clan, but he was not the Divine Empress's son.

In the past few years, there should also have been no affection between him and the Divine Empress.

Why did he defy three successive decrees? Why did he want to display his disdain for the Imperial Court through his opposition to Zhou Tong? Why was he using his silence to contend against his own teacher?

Xue Xingchuan was already buried, and while Xue He had been escorted back to the capital and jailed in Zhou Prison for various complex reasons, his life was probably in no danger. The Xue Estate had returned to tranquility, but no one had forgotten that during the unrest that had taken place at the funeral the Xue Estate held a few days ago, many factions had sent a representative. Was this out of consideration for the old government, or enmity for the new? Was it reverence of the Pope, or a challenge to Shang Xingzhou?

If this were still Tianhai's government, Zhou Tong would certainly have used this matter to stir up a great storm, but now he was acting completely out of character, maintaining a strange silence.

Anyone who knew that a figure like Wang Po was hiding in the capital and could at any time walk out of some random tea shop on

the side of the street and send a blade glow flying at them would probably be as silent.

Significantly, in the past few days, Zhou Tong stopped staying at the Imperial Palace as he had done in the first few days and returned to the alley of the Northern Military Department to begin overseeing matters once more.

"Tie Shu is probably close by. He will be constantly guarding Zhou Tong."

Su Moyu continued, "He will wait for Wang Po to reveal his blade, and then kill him. This way, he will not be violating the oath to the starry sky. Neither the Pope nor anyone else will be able to punish him."

The chilly autumn breeze blew in through the window, rustling the pages of books, yet it was unable to cause the slightest change in Chen Changsheng's expression.

As he watched the silent and unspeaking Chen Changsheng by the window, Su Moyu inwardly sighed and said, "It's truly a pity about that day at Tanzhe Temple."

On that day, if the Li Palace had been willing to pay everything and killed Tie Shu in the autumn rain, their problems now would not be so intractable.

Chen Changsheng's gaze remained on his book. "That day wasn't

good for killing."

Su Moyu understood that he was speaking about the princely carriage on the cliff and replied, "If Zhexiu had been supervising the affair, he would still have done it."

If they were willing to pay everything, there was no need to fear the princely carriage and the thunderous hooves beyond the mountains.

"How could the Storms of the Eight Directions be so easy to kill? Even if we succeeded, the Li Palace would have to pay an enormous price."

If Tie Shu had really been killed on that day, just which one of the four Prefects of the Orthodoxy would have been able to walk alive out of the autumn rain?

As Chen Changsheng perused his book, he added, "And it would throw the world into chaos."

Su Moyu argued, "If Tang Tang were supervising the matter, he would still insist on doing it, because the esteemed master of the Dao would also probably not want to see the world in chaos. Thus, he would choose to kill."

Chen Changsheng did not believe that the matter would develop as Su Moyu or Tang Thirty-Six believed.

The Li Palace had wanted to kill Tie Shu for the purpose of protecting Wang Po.

Wang Po's purpose in coming to the capital was to kill Zhou Tong.

Zhou Tong was a person the Imperial Palace had to protect.

Wang Po was a person the Imperial Palace had to kill.

Chen Changsheng was keenly aware that for the sake of these four statements, his master would be willing to throw the world into chaos, and also...

"Martial Uncle wouldn't act this way."

He raised his head and gazed out the window at the bleak and indifferent autumn as he said, "Because he is not that sort of person."

The Pope was a powerful man who cherished the world.

But he was not a hero, much less a ruthless man of ambition.

When he gazed at the stars, there would be things that he revered, and he wanted to protect Chen Changsheng and Wang Po.

But he also did not want the world to fall into chaos, for the people to be cast into misery.

For him to keep the situation in the capital at a level where it could still be controlled was already extremely challenging.

And for the person sitting across from him at the chessboard?

The Imperial Palace was very quiet. Many people in front of that palace hall had seen the silhouette of Shang Xingzhou cast by the lights in that room, but nobody knew what he was thinking.

Shang Xingzhou was probably doing something, but nobody knew what it was.

Just as it was in the coup of the Mausoleum of Books and the rebellion of Xuelao City, his silence was often a prelude to a sudden clap of thunder.

No one knew where Wang Po was either.

The entire world knew that he was in the capital and wanted to kill someone, yet no one was able to find him.

He had vanished, but a restaurant in the southern part of the city had gained an accountant from Wenshui.

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The autumn deepened over the capital, continued to deepen, deepened until it had reached the greatest extreme. The chill pierced into the bones, but fortunately, the liveliness in the air and the lanterns and colored banners decorating the streets somewhat diluted the cold.

The confluence of the north and south, this grand event anticipated by all, had finally been formally announced, and the celebration was about to take place.

This celebration was grand to an unprecedented scale, both a celebration of the success of the confluence of the north and south, and also an attempt by the new government to completely wash away the odor left behind by the Tianhai Divine Empress.

The diplomatic mission from White Emperor City arrived at the capital a few days before the festivities. Of the White Emperor couple, only one came in the end.

After engaging in a heaven-shaking battle with the Demon Lord, the White Emperor had also suffered significant injuries. The one to come was his empress, the Chief Princess of the Great Western Continent.

Many people cast their gazes towards the Orthodox Academy.

Everyone knew that the Orthodox Academy had always had an extremely close relationship with the demi-humans, and Chen Changsheng was even Princess Luoluo's teacher.

So what sort of effect would the arrival of the demi-human diplomatic mission have on the situation in the capital?

To this question, not even Chen Changsheng knew the answer.

On the day the diplomatic mission arrived in the capital, he put down the book in his hands for the first time, took a bath and changed his clothes, and then waited for the arrival of an old friend.

An old friend truly did come. However, it was not Luoluo, but Jin Yulu.

"Her Highness is currently at a critical moment of breaking through and could not leave. I encountered Xuanyuan Po on the road. He had suffered significant injuries and required rest, so I could not bring him back."

Jin Yulu looked at him, patted him on the shoulder, and then sighed.

'Could not leave', 'not able to be brought back'.

Chen Changsheng felt quite sad.

Chapter 695 – To Not Meet Again

Of course, only when one understood would one be sad.

However, Chen Changsheng was sad not because he understood, but because of the departures and the difficulty of meeting again.

With his current status and his relationship with Luoluo, if the Chief Princess visited the capital, it was only proper that she come to visit him, but she had not.

This was the stance of the demi-humans.

"His Majesty is friends with that teacher of yours."

Jin Yulu looked at him and sighed. "So at the very beginning, His Majesty did not care that you and Princess Luoluo were so close, and even hoped for success in the future. However, His Majesty calculated all, but he was unable to calculate that your teacher would have other thoughts, and that you...would also have other thoughts."

Chen Changsheng kept his silence, not explaining his reasons.

Jin Yulu continued, "Of course, even if your teacher gets new ideas, His Majesty has means of helping you protect your position as successor of the Pope."

The words of Saints carry unbounded might.

Chen Changsheng thought of these words.

His teacher Shang Xingzhou was also naturally a Saint.

But the words of two Saints still had to carry more strength than the words of one.

If the White Emperor persisted in supporting him, along with the official designation from the Pope, even Shang Xingzhou would be unable to protest.

Would the White Emperor support him? Before today, this did not seem like a problem he needed to consider.

Everyone believed that this was a right and expected matter.

Chen Changsheng was Luoluo's teacher and had always had a close relationship with the demi-humans. If he were to ascend to the seat of the Pope, this was in every respect the best result for the demi-humans.

Now it seemed that the White Emperor's stance had clearly changed.

"Your display has been far too immature. His Majesty is deeply concerned by this."

Jin Yulu explained, "Even if we support you and assist you in becoming master of the Li Palace, do you have the ability to sit steadily upon that throne? If you cannot, then why should we support you?"

Chen Changsheng's mind felt somewhat dazed.

It felt like he had the word 'mature' quite a lot recently.

At the age of fourteen, when he entered the capital, he had a composure and steadiness that far surpassed his age. Rarely was there anyone that felt he was lacking in this aspect.

Now it seemed that it had not been enough, at least not enough to become a major figure.

But what did it mean to be mature?

Chen Changsheng understood that in the view of many people, in the view of the White Emperor couple, he had truly done many immature things.

As his martial uncle the Pope had personally told him, as long as he conceded, surrendered, lowered himself, his teacher would have no reason not to re-accept him.

Even if he could not, he should have acted with more maturity.

For instance, in the past few days, he should not have been in the Orthodox Academy, but in the Li Palace, using his time to understand all aspects of the Orthodoxy.

For instance, some days ago, he should not have ventured beyond the city gate and gone to the fields beside the official path to bury Xue Xingchuan, or the Xue Estate to pay his respects.

For instance, that even earlier day when he was in the Orthodox Academy, he refused to accept the decree, instead using one thousand swords to cut Eunuch Lin until he was drenched in blood.

For instance, that day when he carried the Tianhai Divine Empress's body down from the Mausoleum of Books, he brushed past his teacher as if they were strangers.

Just like in these past few days, he had been anticipating the arrival of the diplomatic mission from White Emperor City.

He believed that there would always be people who would support him. Even if there weren't any humans, at least the demi-humans would.

Now it seemed that this sort of anticipation was truly laughable.

He looked out the window. Even the great banyan tree by the lake had found it impossible to retain all of its greenness, growing

more dreary and cold. The lake was covered in a thin sheet of ice, the wilted grass plated in a thin layer of frost.

Yes, these things had all been immature, naive, childish, passionate, impulsive, pathetic, laughable daydreams.

But they were still warmer than this lonely, bleak, and cold world, weren't they?

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The Chief Princess went to the Imperial Palace, and then to the Li Palace, meeting with both Shang and Yin.

No one knew what these three Saints discussed, nor did anyone know what sort of pact the demi-humans reached with the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy.

The people only knew that she did not go to the Orthodox Academy, nor did she ever invite the person within the Orthodox Academy to the palace in which she resided.

The fact that she did not meet Chen Changsheng surprised many people, but it also made the situation in the capital much clearer.

The southern diplomatic mission also arrived. The Longevity

Sect, the Qiushan clan and other noble clans, Holy Maiden Peak, and even Scholartree Manor had all sent representatives.

Anyone could see which way the wind was blowing in the capital. Thus, sharing the same attitude as the Chief Princess, no one in the southern diplomatic mission went to the Orthodox Academy.

Because it was too sensitive, and also because they wanted to display their attitudes to the Imperial Court. In addition, as southerners, they had no good impressions of the Tianhai Divine Empress, so they naturally would not support Chen Changsheng for her sake.

Holy Maiden Peak had only sent the South Stream Temple disciples staying at the Orthodox Academy a few letters and tools.

At dusk on a certain day, someone knocked on the gate of the Orthodox Academy. A guest had come to pay a visit.

The guest was Guan Feibai, disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect.

The people of the Orthodox Academy and the Mount Li Sword Sect had been acquainted with each other for three years already. The story between them was very complex, as they had been both enemies and friends, but they had still gotten to know each other in the end.

Because the two sides were truly kindred spirits.

But this was actually the first time a disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect stepped into the Orthodox Academy.

Guan Feibai followed behind Su Moyu and seemed to take in the scenery of the Orthodox Academy with great interest. Only when he saw several junior sisters of South Stream Temple that he knew did he draw back his gaze.

In the library, Chen Changsheng met with him.

He was the future Pope, and though Guan Feibai was a member of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, a genius disciple of Mount Li, the discrepancy in status was still very large. The conversation between the two did not become an amicable exchange, nor a meeting of friends. Of course, it was also not like it was in the past, brimming with swift and forceful sword intent and hostility. It was just a simple chat.

This conversation was truly very simple.

"You were the only one to come from Mount Li?"

"It's just going through the motions, so there's no need for many people."

"Why is it you?"

"It would be the same with anyone else."

"Then it would have been better if you just sent Qi Jian."

"Do you not feel shame?"

Su Moyu very promptly interposed, "Pay attention to your language."

Guan Feibai somewhat angrily glared at Chen Changsheng, then asked, "Where's Tang Tang?"

"What are you looking for him for?"

"Of course it's to fight."

"Competing in swords sounds a bit better."

"Whatever you say."

"He's not here."

"Where'd he go?"

"He went home."

"...Zhexiu then?"

"...Still fighting?"

"...Competing in swords."

"He's not here."

"Where'd he go?"

"I don't know."

After hearing Chen Changsheng's answer, Guan Feibai fell silent.

Only now did he realize that both Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu were not at the Orthodox Academy.

He could imagine how painful this period of time in the Orthodox Academy had been for Chen Changsheng.

"Then I'm leaving."

"I won't send you off."

Since the people he wanted to find weren't here and he couldn't fight the fights he wanted to fight, it was naturally best to leave. However, before leaving, Guan Feibai had a request.

He said to Chen Changsheng, "You send me off."

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "I won't."

Guan Feibai persisted, "Just send me off to the academy gate."

Chen Changsheng refused, "I don't want to."

If he sent Guan Feibai off at the academy gate, many people would see.

This was precisely what Guan Feibai wanted.

Chen Changsheng did not want to drag Mount Li into these turbid waters, so he persisted in refusal.

Guan Feibai thought this over, then said, "Then I'm leaving."

Chen Changsheng said, "Thank you."

Guan Feibai walked towards the gate, waving his hand without turning his head as he replied, "You're welcome."

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Tang Tang had returned to Wenshui, but where had Zhexiu gone? Nobody knew.

The Imperial Court would naturally not forget that young wolf expert. The spies of the Department for Purging Officials had never ceased their search for him, but they had turned up nothing, just like with Wang Po.

The courtyard within the alley of the Northern Military Department had been rebuilt to its original appearance. The flat ground was covered with fresh soil, waiting for the spring to plant a layer of grass.

When the darkness was deepest, the ground was covered in a layer of ice. From the depths of the soil came an extremely faint chafing sound, like silkworms gnawing on mulberry leaves, or countless earthworms boring with all their might into the earth before the winter arrived.

The period of deepest autumn was the beginning of winter.

After the smooth conclusion of the celebrations over the confluence of the north and south, the various diplomatic missions unexpectedly had no intention of leaving the capital. This was because the Pope's illness was worsening by the day.

In the courtyard, Zhou Tong gazed at the cold-resistant crabapple tree and muttered to himself, "It's time."

To some people, it was time.

In a tea house in the south of the city, the accountant bid farewell to the owner, the shopkeeper, and the waiters, then exited through the door.

Their interactions over the short span of ten-some days had actually made everyone in the tea house, from the owner to the shopkeeper, to the most ordinary of waiters, feel broken-hearted over his departure.

Chen Changsheng placed his brush on the inkstone, blew on the paper to dry the ink, sealed the letter, and passed it to Su Moyu. Then, he walked out of the library.

Su Moyu gazed at his back, knowing in his heart that after today's departure, it would perhaps be very difficult for them to meet again.

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Chapter 696 – A Great Personage

The teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy sent Chen Changsheng off with their eyes as he walked towards the gate. The expression in their eyes was very complex, their moods very sorrowful.

The female disciples of South Stream Temple were waiting for him at the gate.

Chen Changsheng indicated that these women did not need to follow him and walked out.

"This is the order of the temple master," Ye Xiaolian angrily called from behind him.

Chen Changsheng knew that it would be very difficult to convince these girls, so he said to Priest Xin who had come to welcome him outside the academy, "Please."

Priest Xin sighed and waved his hands, ordering the priests of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and the Orthodoxy cavalry to step forward and surround the Orthodox Academy. Naturally, they also blocked the disciples of South Stream Temple within.

Chen Changsheng turned back to the Orthodox Academy and silently bid farewell.

Three and a half years had passed since that spring day.

He did not know when he would next see them, the ivies and people within the Orthodox Academy.

He had written four letters and passed them to Su Moyu, just as Su Li had done, clearly communicating everything he wanted to communicate.

The chill coming from the well of New North Bridge was getting colder and colder. Only two years were needed before the little Black Dragon would be able to escape.

He no longer had any debts with this world, no burdens to shoulder, so he could advance freely.

As he watched Chen Changsheng's back disappear into Hundred Flowers Lane, Priest Xin felt a complex assortment of emotions.

It did not take long for the news that Chen Changsheng had left the Orthodox Academy to spread to the entire capital.

In these past few days of late autumn, Zhou Tong was not often at the Imperial Palace. Instead, he was at the newly renovated offices of the Department for Purging Officials, overseeing matters.

When this news was delivered to the alley of the Northern Military Department, he happened to be sitting in a palace armchair, brand-new yet painstakingly worked on until it looked old, and drinking tea.

The tea he drank was the still the most expensive Great Crimson Gown, and his garb was still that great crimson official's robe that seemed to give off the stench of blood.

His face was very pale, his eyes so apathetic as to seem utterly devoid of human emotion. He looked more like some ferocious ghost.

"Make the preparations to welcome an honored guest."

He lightly placed his teacup on the table and calmly ordered his subordinates in the courtyard.

The officials received the order and began to hurriedly rush about. The atmosphere both inside and outside Zhou Prison became particularly stern and oppressive.

On a distant street, a man exuding a cold and gloomy Qi akin to iron glanced up at the sky upon hearing this news.

The sky was getting darker and darker not because of the passage of time, but because the clouds were piling thicker and thicker. It was no longer the season of crisp autumn climate. It seemed like it was about to snow.

Not long afterwards, the newest report was quickly sent to the alley of the Northern Military Department: Chen Changsheng had entered the Li Palace.

In the small courtyard, those most loyal and most powerful subordinates turned to that palace armchair, thinking to themselves, could His Excellency have overthought things?

The Imperial Court had arrayed so many forces, would even a person like Chen Changsheng still dare to invade Zhou Prison?

"Going to the Li Palace does not mean that he won't go another place later today."

Zhou Tong gazed at the red clay teapot in his hands as if it were something dead and indifferently said, "Let us wait for him to come out."

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The four seasons did not exist in the deepest part of the Li Palace, and so there was naturally no cold of winter, nor was there any sign that snow was about to fall in that piece of sky cut out by the eaves.

Just like the Green Leaf, which was still brimming with life, tender and green. Its leaves swayed in the falling trickle of clear water, displaying its beautiful stem.

No sign of illness could be seen on the Pope's face, but his wrinkles had deepened and increased in number. He seemed much older.

Just as Mei Lisha did on the autumn day before he died, elder cultivators would in a very brief span of time display their elderliness.

Seeing the Pope's face, Chen Changsheng felt rather sorrowful and sad, that this was unfair of both this great earth and the starry heavens above.

The Pope was younger than Shang Xingzhou by two years.

He was keenly aware that if his martial uncle had not encountered so many conflicts between his own demands and the situation of the world, and thus been unable to maintain a truly serene Dao heart, he would never have aged so quickly.

From the look on his face, the Pope knew what he was thinking. Smiling, he asked, "Are you not thinking that good people do not live long?"

Chen Changsheng silently nodded.

"But I am not at all a good person. Of course, even if that statement is true, it is no reason for us to become bad people."

Chen Changsheng was very pleased by these words. Opening

wide his bright eyes, he seriously affirmed, "Yes."

The Pope wiped the beads of water from the Green Leaf. Taking the towel offered by Chen Changsheng to wipe his hands, he indicated that Chen Changsheng should sit. "Your master has been very quiet over these past few days. Do you not think it strange?"

Both the Orthodox Academy's defiance of the decree and Wang Po's entering the capital were major events for the new government, but Shang Xingzhou had not once given his opinion on them, not even saying anything during the celebration of the confluence of the north and south.

Chen Changsheng clearly understood that this was not in accordance with his master's personality, but he was truly not concerned about it.

"In these past few days, he has been constantly attempting to get the Imperial Court to control the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets," the Pope went on. "It seems now that he's on the verge of success."

No matter how little Chen Changsheng cared about these matters, he still couldn't help but be shocked by this statement.

The Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets was no ordinary organization, and possessed an unimaginable amount of resources and power. When the Divine Empress reigned, the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets could have been considered one of the strongest pillars of the Great Zhou Imperial Court. Now, with both the Divine Empress and the Elder of Heavenly Secrets dead, if Shang

Xingzhou were able to keep the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets under the control of the Imperial Court, it would be a truly extraordinary feat.

The importance of this matter could not be overestimated.

The rebellion in Xuelao City had killed humanity's greatest foe in one thousand years, momentarily addressing the danger of the demons encroaching southward. Immediately after, he unhesitatingly took over negotiations from Tianhai's government to dependably and prudently push the confluence of the north and south forward until both sides finally signed. If Shang Xingzhou was even able to settle the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets...

Even if he remained reading books in that little room in the Imperial Palace, not seeing people much, he would still be a god in the hearts of the people.

"To Senior Brother, this is not at all perfect."

The Pope gazed at Chen Changsheng and said, "You know what he wanted to do at the very start."

Chen Changsheng knew.

To Shang Xingzhou, the ideal situation was nothing else than him once more possessing the authority of the Orthodoxy after the Pope died.

However, although he was a member of the Orthodoxy's legitimate line of succession, many events had happened in the past and he was also the Pope's senior brother, so from all sorts of angles, it was impossible for him to ascend to the throne of Pope.

Thus, after the night of the Mausoleum of Books, the first thing he did was push forward Mu Jiushi and attempt to replace Chen Changsheng, but he did not succeed.

It was precisely because he had failed to smoothly seize the Orthodoxy that he put so much of his mind into ensuring that the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets would fall into his hands.

The Pope suddenly said, "Position is relative, as is importance."

Chen Changsheng recalled that the phrase 'Position is relative' had been written in the first page of Wang Zhice's notebook.

"To create a balance between position and importance, thus preventing the entire world from dancing according to the whims of people like us, is what I have wanted to do throughout these past few years."

The Pope looked him in the eyes and said, "Only this way can the ordinary people living in this world live slightly more steady lives."

Chen Changsheng understood.

In the later years of Emperor Xian, the Pope had supported the

Divine Empress. This time, he had supported his master and the Chen Imperial Clan. Now, with his master and the Imperial Court at the peak of power, the Orthodoxy wanted to travel in the opposite direction, the further the better.

This was related to his feelings and his Dao, but it could also be said to have no relationship. This was an indiscriminate benevolence to the millions of people of the world, but in specific matters, it could often appear sticky and rough.

He also understood why his martial uncle was telling him these things.

These were teachings, a legacy, the current Pope instructing his successor.

"Understanding does not mean I can do it."

Chen Changsheng thought of the storm over the Mausoleum of Books, the corpses by the road, the blood and fire in the capital, and fell into a daze.

"Perhaps I still haven't learned how to be a great personage."

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Chapter 697 – Small Principles

"Every person is born a small person."

The Pope smiled and gestured with his two hands to show length. "But every person will grow bigger. There are some matters that you can learn as long as you are willing to learn them."

Chen Changsheng was well-versed in the Daoist Canon and whether it was the path of the sword or any other skill, he had always been able to learn it. His talent and comprehension were both extremely excellent, so just what couldn't he learn?

Upon hearing the Pope's words, he very naturally recalled that conversation he had with the Pope in the library on the third day after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books...but the quantity of books in the world was as vast the sea, knowledge as uncountable as the stars. Carpentry, farming, herb growing, tailoring, building courtyards—there were many topics that needed to be learned, so what need was there to learn how to be a great personage?

"What if I don't want to learn it?" he seriously asked the Pope. "Does this not mean that I am not a good candidate for Pope?"

The Pope smiled and replied, "This sort of inference naturally has its basis, but even if you don't want to learn right now, you just need to remain quiet for a period of time."

Without pondering this statement, Chen Changsheng directly displayed his refusal. "I can't do it, because there won't be this

period of time. Master wants me to truly obey."

The Pope calmly looked into his eyes and asked, "You are not willing, even if only on the surface?"

In the view of the common people, master and disciple shared the same relationship as father and son. A student obeying his master or teacher was a matter in accordance with the principles of the heavens and earth. Whatever one's teacher asked the student to do, whether it was to be silent for a few days, tie one's hands up and wait to be captured, or even suicide on the spot, the student should accept it without hesitation, and only this way would they fulfill their duty as a student.

Chen Changsheng did not think this way.

"Yes, I'm not willing."

The Pope inquired, "Why?"

Chen Changsheng had never considered this question. It was just that on that night in the Mausoleum of Books, from the moment he saw his master and knew the truth of the matter, he began to have his own way of thinking.

"Perhaps...it's because Master has done things that I don't like."

"In this case, you like the Empress's way of doing things?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head.

The Pope asked, "Then why did you make that choice?"

The choice he spoke of referred to the dawn of that day when he carried the Tianhai Divine Empress's body down from the Mausoleum of Books.

It also referred to the sealing of the Orthodox Academy's gate for several days, its defiance and disrespect of the decree, and even today, the Imperial Court's inability to control him.

The Pope's question was also the question asked by countless people in the capital. Eunuch Lin had asked it, as had Su Moyu. Many people had asked him this question.

After coming from Xining Village to the capital, he had always been the successor of the Orthodoxy, at the same time someone who stood opposite to the Tianhai Divine Empress.

There was no affection between him and the Tianhai Divine Empress.

He was not Crown Prince Zhaoming, so he was naturally not her son.

So why?

Chen Changsheng answered, "The Empress was misled by Master into mistaking my identity, causing her to treat me as her son, resulting in all those events on the Mausoleum of Books during that night."

If she had not changed his fate, perhaps the Divine Empress really might have obtained victory in that coup, or at least kept her life.

The Pope replied, "Since it was a misunderstanding, what she paid was towards your senior brother, and not to you. You do not need to bear this kindness."

"I understand Martial Uncle's meaning. But on the Mausoleum of Books, at least for a time, she truly regarded and loved me as a son."

After a very long period of silence, Chen Changsheng said, "I don't know who my parents were, but since she once truly regarded me as her son, I will regard her as my mother."

The Pope sighed and said no more.

Since he treated Tianhai as his mother, he naturally had to send her off.

No one could overcome this principle.

Chen Changsheng continued, "As for Master...since he never regarded me as a disciple from the start, I won't recognize him as my master."

The Pope smiled at him. "That's reasonable."

After voicing these two statements that he most wanted to say, Chen Changsheng felt thoroughly refreshed and prepared to say goodbye.

The Pope glanced at the sky cut out by the eaves and said, "It's about to snow, so remember to take an umbrella."

Chen Changsheng wasn't very clear as to whether there was any deeper meaning behind these words. He was just concerned that this elder who had deeply cared for him would feel downhearted by his departure.

He said to the Pope, "Martial Uncle, the Li Palace still needs a new master. Does Martial Uncle not think that Principal Mao is very suitable?"

The Pope replied, "If he were suitable, then the matter would be done, and there would be no reason for me to let you leave."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I am not suitable."

The Pope gave a faint smile and asked, "How are you not suitable?"

Not even Chen Changsheng's opponents would be able to give a reason as to why Chen Changsheng was not suitable for inheriting the position of Pope.

He was a member of the legitimate line of the Orthodoxy, well-versed in the Daoist Canon, possessed of incredible talent and even more incredible status, and his temperament was pure, calm and benevolent. He was the best candidate for Pope.

In the past, people could use age to question the decision—he was far too young—but now the south already had a Holy Maiden that was even younger.

"I'm too immature, young and impulsive, liable to delay great undertakings."

Chen Changsheng looked out at the gloomy sky, thinking about those young and impulsive matters he was about to carry out, and felt somewhat nervous and uneasy.

"These are precisely the reasons I chose you."

The Pope sighed with emotion, "If you became calm and composed like a piece of wood while in the prime of your youth, at most, you would just become a second me in the future. To the Orthodoxy and the people, what meaning would that have?"

Chen Changsheng understood and earnestly replied, "Then

whether or not I remain, I will always strive to cultivate according to Martial Uncle's requests."

The Pope knew that he understood his meaning and was very grateful. "If you are leaving the capital, remember to take my baby with you."

Chen Changsheng followed the Pope's gaze and realized that he was talking about the Green Leaf.

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Chen Changsheng left the Li Palace.

In a very short amount of time, this news was spread to the entire capital.

The courtyard within the alley of the Northern Military Department was naturally the first place to know.

Zhou Tong sat on the palace armchair, his left hand holding the red clay teapot while his right hand lightly stroked it. Staring at the ground, he expressionlessly asked, "Where did he go?"

The several officials all looked each other in the eyes, and then one reported with uncertainty in his voice, "Three reports have all

confirmed that he entered the Wei Estate."

Zhou Tong raised his head at this report and narrowed his eyes at his subordinates. His voice was slightly sharp as he asked, "The Wei Estate?"

The officials hastily replied, "Your Excellency, there is no mistake."

Zhou Tong knew his subordinates would not make a mistake.

It was just that for a moment, he had been unable to recall which estate was the Wei Estate.

Moreover, he did not understand—Chen Changsheng had left the Orthodox Academy and gone to the Li Palace, but why hadn't he come yet to the alley of the Northern Military Department...to kill him?

Just what sort of place was the Wei Estate?

The Department for Purging Officials had no time to respond. All the powers in the capital, the Prince of Xiang, the Prince of Zhongshan, Xu Shiji, and even the Li Palace did not have any time to respond.

Chen Changsheng had already reached the depths of the Wei Estate.

Snow finally began to fall from the sky, slowly covering the lawn.

Just like the face of the patriarch of the Wei Estate, it was very white.

Chen Changsheng looked at this person and said, "Greetings, Lord Wei."

This Lord Wei's voice trembled as he said, "Greeting, Principal Chen. What honorable business does Your Eminence have at this official's home?"

Chen Changsheng's eyes were very bright, his posture upright, his voice very sincere.

"I've come to kill you."

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Chapter 698 – The Fall of First Snow

Everyone knew that Chen Changsheng wanted to kill someone today. People put their focus on many places within the capital. The alley of the Northern Military Department was naturally the most important one, but not even the Imperial Palace was excluded. However, no one had imagined that after he walked out of the Li Palace, he did not go to the alley of the Northern Military Department, nor to the Imperial Palace, but to the Wei Estate.

This caught many people rather unprepared, and then perplexed them with the same questions as Zhou Tong.

What sort of estate was the Wei Estate? Why did Chen Changsheng go there first? Could it be that in his mind, this place was even more important than the Imperial Palace or Zhou Prison?

Soon after, some people recalled that the current Assistant Minister of Rites carried the surname of Wei, and the wife that he had just recently cast off and driven home had the surname Xue, and was the eldest daughter of the Xue Estate.

Was it just because of this reason?

What was Chen Changsheng going to the Wei Estate for? To vent the Xue Estate's anger? Or was it to persuade Assistant Minister Wei to take back his wife?

The moment Assistant Minister Wei recognized Chen Changsheng, he began to nervously speculate as to the reason for

his coming and also obtained a similar conclusion.

Chen Changsheng had assuredly come to vent the Xue Estate's anger, or he had come to 'persuade' him to rejoin with Xue Zhihua.

The word 'persuade' naturally meant 'force'.

Assistant Minister Wei was rather angry, but he did not dare show it.

If he really did take his wife back, the Wei Estate would certainly lose a little face and he would certainly receive no small amount of inconvenience, but...what else could he do?

Chen Changsheng's authority as the future Pope was far above his own.

He had already made his preparations, already thought of how nervous and angry, yet not too upset, he should be when Chen Changsheng made his demand. Reluctantly, but without losing any of his demeanor, he would accept this demand.

It was just then that Chen Changsheng had spoken of his reason for coming, his eyes bright, his posture upright, his voice sincere: "I've come to kill you."

The snowflakes drifted down into the courtyard. All was silent within the world.

Assistant Minister Wei stood in the snow, his face pale, his mouth slightly agape. For a very long time, he found himself unable to speak.

It turned out that he had not come to make a fuss nor force him into marriage. Rather, it was to kill him.

He was the Assistant Minister of Rites. In the eyes of ordinary people, he was a tall and unclimbable mountain. However, to him, it was this youth that was the truly lofty peak.

If the future Pope wanted to kill you, just who would be willing to come to your rescue? No other conclusion awaited you except death.

You should be nervous and angry, but not too upset. Reluctantly, but without losing any demeanor, you should accept his demand... and die.

No one wanted to die.

"Though I've done many wrong things, none of them are a justification for me to die."

Assistant Minister Wei stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes, his gaze particularly gloomy, his breathing extremely rough.

"Yes, neither the laws of the Great Zhou nor the scriptures of the church say that execution is the punishment for driving a wife from one's home. In the past, I definitely wouldn't have killed you, but now my view is somewhat different. Righting a wrong doesn't require overdoing, but a price must be paid for committing a wrong, and it must be seen. You forgot gratitude and committed injustice, so I want to tell all the people and believers of the world that what you have done is wrong."

Chen Changsheng finally said, "And a repulsive punishment makes for a beautiful eulogy."

As he spoke, his eyes were very bright, his tone extremely serious. He was not speaking falsehoods, was not intentionally ridiculing the minister, did not seek to humiliate him right before his death. He truly thought this way. He had come to the Wei Estate to kill the minister precisely because he hoped that in the future, such incidents would occur a little less in this world.

Two abnormal patches of red appeared on Assistant Minister Wei's pale face and his body began to tremble.

He did not know what to say.

In the view of a 'normal person' like him, the current Chen Changsheng was a madman. Who would pay the price of death for such a matter as casting off one's wife? Even if he did commit somewhat of an injustice, was inconstant and shallow in his love, with a heart as cold as iron...why did he have to die? If nothing unexpected happened, his wife's clan, along with his wife, would truly be stifled to death by the Imperial Court, but...what did that

have to do with him?

If this was just an excuse to kill him, that would be fine.

But it was not. This was Chen Changsheng's reason for killing him.

His eyes shone brighter and brighter, his tone growing ever more serious. In the eyes of 'normal people', he was getting crazier and crazier.

Assistant Minister Wei gazed at the walls of the courtyard, seeking a chance to live. He realized that it was futile and began to wail in utmost despair.

The snowflakes fell upon a piece of paper. They gave very soft sounds, like the crinkle of some beautiful item being destroyed.

This was a paper as white as the first snow. There were a few holes punched in this paper, making it seem abnormally horrifying.

A voice came from one of these black holes. "Everyone says that I'm the madman...it seems to me that you're crazier than I am."

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Many people knew that Painted Armor Xiao Zhang had a violent personality, and that there were a few problems with his mind.

However, this year, in the early winter, when he saw Chen Changsheng telling Assistant Minister Wei with a serious tone and bright eyes that he had come to kill him, Xiao Zhang had a very strange feeling.

He felt that Chen Changsheng was a madman, a deadly earnest madman, and this fact greatly shocked him.

When Chen Changsheng saw Xiao Zhang behind the tree, he was also greatly shocked. No one in the capital knew that he would go to the Wei Estate and presumably many people were currently rushing their way here now, so how had Xiao Zhang been waiting for him in advance?

"How come you're here?" he asked, his face brimming with astonishment.

Simultaneously, that incredibly cold and sharp dagger, stainless and frostless, had already stabbed through his sleeves and astonished atmosphere to reach Assistant Minister Wei's throat.

Xiao Zhang's face was covered in a white sheet of paper, so he naturally showed no expression, but everyone who saw this white paper would feel that it exuded contempt.

This contempt was naturally aimed at Chen Changsheng's sword. It was like a strange and noiseless laugh, brimming with derision.

You actually dare to kill someone in front of me?

A spear rose up out of the snow, shaking his clothes and piercing through the chill, striving to cleave through the world.

With a thought, the icy and sharp end of the spear would clash with Chen Changsheng's dagger.

No matter how talented Chen Changsheng was, even if he had won against Eunuch Lin in the Orthodox Academy, if he were to directly confront this spear with his dagger, how could he possibly defeat Xiao Zhang?

In the next moment, Xiao Zhang's spear would break past Chen Changsheng's dagger.

He would stand in front of Assistant Minister Wei.

The first assassination of this day of winter's first snow in the capital would come to an end.

At this moment, it seemed that this was an inevitable matter.

However, the unexpected would always occur.

Like today.

The white paper on Xiao Zhang's face flapped and that unspoken derision and contempt disappeared.

The noiseless and strange laugh became a truly strange howl that resonated through the estate and tore through the snowy sky.

The track of the spear shifted by the tiniest amount.

It was unable to clash against the dagger.

The cold dagger pierced through the air, carrying blood with it.

Blood squirted into the falling snow, transforming into a most beautiful sight.

An object flew through the air, fiercely spinning and crazily flying. Finally, it crashed to the ground, throwing up ice and snow.

It was Assistant Minister Wei's head, its eyes unable to close in time.

Xiao Zhang suddenly raised his head and looked forward. His face suddenly exuded a frosty aura, as if looking into an abyss.

A blue-clothed man had appeared at the gate of the Wei Estate.

This person's two eyebrows were slightly drooped, utterly distressed and completely unwilling. At his chest, he held a blade that had still not been unsheathed.

Chapter 699 – Seeking the Dao has a Front and Behind

Wang Po of Tianliang finally appeared in the capital.

Upon seeing the blue-clothed man at the gate, Chen Changsheng finally understood why he had met Xiao Zhang.

The person who understood you most in the world was often not your friend, but your enemy.

This was a stereotypical phrase, and it was often very stereotypically correct.

In the entire capital, only Xiao Zhang would expect Wang Po to come to the Wei Estate. Thus, he had sneaked into the Wei Estate to wait, but he hadn't expected for Chen Changsheng to come first.

Wang Po looked at Chen Changsheng in the snow, rather surprised, and then he smiled.

With his smile, the drooping brows rose upwards, as enchanting as the sun breaking through the clouds.

So you were also here.

This sort of feeling of coincidentally agreeing with each other was truly excellent.

Chen Changsheng and Wang Po were truly kindred spirits, often walking the same path and often heading to the same destination.

Whether it was an abyss filled with the shadow of death, the Divine Kingdom in the sea of stars above, the heavily guarded Imperial Palace, or the utterly obscure Wei Estate, it didn't matter.

Wang Po invited Chen Changsheng, "Together?"

"Okay." Without hesitation, Chen Changsheng accepted the invitation. He began making his way out of the estate. With a shake of his right hand, drops of blood fell off his dagger and into the snow, blooming like plum blossoms.

Xiao Zhang was furious, shouting at the two, "Hey!"

Spear in hand, he stood amidst the wind and snow, possessed of a brazen and violent grandeur that soared to the heavens.

Yet Wang Po did not even glance at him, while Chen Changsheng turned to glance at him, clasped his hands in respect, then turned back around and continued walking.

Wang Po's disregard and Chen Changsheng's indifference made it impossible for Xiao Zhang to control himself any longer. "AYAYAYA! You're pissing me off!"

His shout was hard to listen to, hoarse and also somewhat shrill, like a crow in a desert that hadn't had anything to drink in days.

At this point, Chen Changsheng was already outside the Wei Estate and standing together with Wang Po.

Upon hearing Xiao Zhang's strange shout, Wang Po once more drooped his brows. With a somewhat helpless tone, he asked, "Just what do you want to do?"

Every since they were young, he and Xiao Zhang, Liang Wangsun, Xun Mei, and Xiao De would often compete and swap pointers. Sometimes it would be at the Grand Examination, sometimes at Boiling Stone Summit, sometimes in the Grand Examination, the Mausoleum of Books, Blue Pass, or Xunyang City. Although they faced each other as rivals or enemies, their familiarity with each other exceeded that of family.

"What do I want to do? Of course, it's to fight with you!"

Xiao Zhang roared, the white paper on his face flapping in the wind and snow, a hair-raising sight.

Wang Po was still very calm, even somewhat wooden. It did not seem like he was facing a powerful foe at all.

Whatever he was thinking, he spent some time very seriously pondering it, then he said to Xiao Zhang, "You can't beat me."

This was the truth, so it hurt all the more.

Xiao Zhang was outraged, his right hand seeming like it wanted to squeeze his spear apart.

Without waiting for him to attack, Wang Po added, "Also, I have other things to do today. If you insist on attacking, I might not be able to hold back."

Xiao Zhang furiously laughed, and asked hoarsely, "So you were holding back for these past twenty years?"

Wang Po replied, "In the past, even if I wasn't holding back, it would have been very difficult for me to kill you on the spot, but today is different."

Xiao Zhang shouted, "How is it different?"

Wang Po replied, "Right now, there are two of us, so you will die."

Xiao Zhang's Qi slackened.

This was still the truth, so it was still very hurtful and difficult to answer.

Xiao Zhang truly did not think that Chen Changsheng would appear at the Wei Estate.

If it were Wang Po, even if he was no match, he would not be afraid.

If it were Chen Changsheng, he would have absolute confidence in challenging him with his spear.

But if his opponents were both Wang Po and Chen Changsheng, then he truly didn't have a chance of winning, and there really was a chance that he would die.

However, this didn't match up with Wang Po's way of doing things, just like how he had vanished without a trace into the capital.

He shouted at Wang Po, "You're actually willing to join hands with someone else?"

Wang Po replied, "I already joined hands with him in Xunyang City. Moreover, the thing I have to do today is rather important, so I can't be held up by you."

Xiao Zhang asked, "Just what are you planning on doing? You should know very well that as long as you walk on the main streets, everyone will want to kill you."

"I want to kill Zhou Tong."

Wang Po's answer was very calm and unperturbed. "I thought you already knew."

From the moment he walked behind Wang Po, Chen Changsheng never once spoke.

His present status was no weaker than Wang Po's or Xiao Zhang's, but on the basis of his respect for his seniors, he was willing to keep his silence.

Xiao Zhang did not forget him, putting to him the same question, "And why must you kill Zhou Tong?"

Chen Changsheng's answer was very earnest. "Just like killing Assistant Minister Wei, only this way can we tell the people of the world that acting this way is wrong, to have people and matters like this appear somewhat less in the world."

On the side, Wang Po was very gratified to hear such words. "Correct, to forget gratitude and commit injustice is wrong, to sell out one's master for glory is also wrong. Since a wrong was committed, a price must be paid."

"Sell out a master? The Tianhai Empress was no good person, but I didn't see either of you coming to kill her," Xiao Zhang sneered back.

Wang Po replied, "Because I wasn't confident I could kill Tianhai, so I didn't have the bravery."

Xiao Zhang asked, "And now you're confident you can kill Zhou

Tong?"

Wang Po answered, "Yes, because my blade is faster now."

Xiao Zhang harshly rebuked, "Where did all these principles come from? For the sake of survival, just what can't be done?"

"You have your principles, we have ours, and what happens if the two contradict? In the past, I didn't understand, but recently I've comprehended it."

Wang Po looked into Xiao Zhang's eyes and gravely said, "If we kill all of you, then our principles will naturally have won."

Chen Changsheng added, "That's the principle."

Xiao Zhang fell silent, then replied, "It sounds rather reasonable."

Wang Po calmly said, "If you agree with this principle, then cease your attempts to keep us, or else we really will kill you."

Xiao Zhang stared back at him and said, "I've had countless battles with you over the past few decades, but you've never had this much to say to me."

Wang Po replied, "Because I want to convince you."

Xiao Zhang asked, "Why do you want to convince me?"

Wang Po replied, "Because I don't have to use my blade against you this way."

Several weeks ago, the entire continent came to know that he had left Scholartree Manor and come to the capital.

From that day forward, he had never once unsheathed his blade.

His blade intent had already accumulated to a nigh unimaginable level.

If Xiao Zhang were to strike with his spear, his defeat against this blade was a certainty.

But Wang Po would no longer have the confidence to walk very far on the streets of the capital.

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In the wind and snow, Wang Po and Chen Changsheng walked through the street, one in front and one behind.

They did not walk side by side because Chen Changsheng

insisted. He felt that he still did not deserve it.

It was like they had returned to Xunyang City. Back then, they had also been one in front and one behind, confronting an expert of the Divine Domain, their bodies covered in blood, unwilling to rest until they died.

At that time, however, they had been breaking out of an encirclement. Today, they were coming to kill.

Chapter 700 – Every Pursuit Has Its Specialty

Snow drifted about the streets, and the waters were covered in sheets of ice.

The capital in the early winter was a lonely and quiet place.

Wang Po and Chen Changsheng walked along the Luo River. The streets were wide and empty. The snow fell without end, as if it had already been falling for ten years.

In the houses on the two sides of the street, behind the walls, in the boats on the Luo River, under the bridges, within the world of shadows, many people were concealed.

These people came from various provinces, princely estates, ministries, and government offices. There were government officers, bailiffs, retainers, family servants, heroes, and the courageous.

However, the icy surface was gradually softened by the winter sun, the naked willow trees began to lightly sway, and yet still no one acted. The two figures walking through the snow were not disturbed in the slightest.

Since the experts of the Imperial Court had never appeared, how could these government officers and bailiffs, retainers and family servants, dare to act first?

As for those heroes and courageous fellows from the provinces and counties, how could they possibly dare act against Wang Po or Chen Changsheng?

The current Assistant Minister of Rites had been assassinated. This was an enormous crime, and the Great Zhou Imperial Court now had sufficient reason to order Wang Po's arrest. The oath made to the starry sky had also lost its effectiveness.

The Imperial Court also had a reason to demand that Chen Changsheng and the Li Palace give an explanation.

The capital was already under heavy guard.

Outside the alley of the Northern Military Department, the man exuding the cold aura of iron had already opened his eyes.

Even now, the Imperial Court had shown no signs of activity. There was naturally a reason for this.

In front of Baohe Pagoda, the long-ready Imperial Guard had been obstructed by the Orthodoxy cavalry. The two black tides of cavalry seemed ready to clash at any moment.

The front of the City Gate Department was crowded with the teachers and students of the five Ivy Academies. Xu Shiji had an ashen complexion, but it was impossible for him to order his cavalry to charge out.

In the wind and snow, Wang Po and Chen Changsheng continued forward. Occasionally, they would stop and say a few words about the winter willows or the snow-covered banks, just like real tourists.

Where had they gone, what were they doing, what was happening in other places, and why had there still been no one to intercept them?

In the shortest time possible, these reports were collected in that courtyard once filled with crabapple blossoms but which now contained only the bare branches of the tree.

Zhou Tong sat in his palace armchair, the crimson color of his gown darkening in shade until it was truly like blood, his face paling until it was truly like snow.

The entire capital was watching the pair walking along the Luo River.

The entire world knew that this pair wanted to come to this courtyard and kill him.

Logically speaking, even if this pair was Wang Po and Chen Changsheng, it was still impossible to reach the alley of the Northern Military Department.

But the circumstances today were rather strange.

The Li Palace truly seemed ready to go crazy together with Chen Changsheng.

And there were still many people coldly looking on as if watching a play.

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Snowflakes fell between the eaves of the Li Palace, drawing a white pattern on the ground. A woman exuding a noble aura stood at the center of the white pattern, thinking about the first, and also last, snowman she had made in the Imperial Palace of the Great Western Continent. She also thought of the wronged expression her daughter had as she was about to depart. However, her heart did not grow soft because of these thoughts. On the contrary, her tone became much more unyielding.

"Logically speaking, as a foreigner, I should just sit and watch this play from the side, but if trouble truly does occur, it will affect the northern expedition."

The Pope gazed at her and said, "So Madam Mu came to visit me?"

This noble lady had the surname 'Mu', as she was a princess of the Great Western Continent. Both the Pope and the Tianhai Divine Empress were accustomed to addressing her as Madam Mu.

She had an even more outstanding identity: Empress of the Demi-humans, a true Saint.

So even when facing the supreme holiness of the Pope, she had no intention of yielding.

"Could it be that you hope I will go see Chen Changsheng?"

The Pope suggested, "Perhaps you should go and see Shang."

Madam Mu slightly arched her brows and said, "Right now, it's him and Wang Po that are going to kill someone."

The Pope replied, "They have to kill someone first."

Madam Mu did not expect to hear this answer. Her voice slightly chilled as she said, "Young people are making trouble, but Your Holiness does not need to interfere?"

"Every person began young, and is Wang Po an ordinary young man? No, and is Chen Changsheng? Also no. He is my successor

and your daughter's teacher." The Pope's smile gradually faded as he slowly said, "You should be hoping that he will succeed."

Madam Mu suddenly commented, "The demi-humans have never requested anything of Your Holiness."

A streak of light suddenly flashed through the Pope's aged eyes, somewhat dazzling and sharp.

Madam Mu's expression did not change. "Your Holiness understands my meaning."

The Pope serenely said, "I know what you are worried about. If I truly did not care about the overarching situation, Zhou Tong would have died three hundred years ago."

This was essentially a promise, but Madam Mu clearly did not deem this sufficient, asking, "Then who sent the Orthodoxy cavalry?"

The Pope sighed and did not answer. Turning around, he walked deeper into the hall.

Mao Qiuyu had at some point appeared. Extending an arm towards Madam Mu with extreme courtesy, he said, "My lady, this way."

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The attitude of the demi-humans and the Great Western Continent were unable to change the Pope's mind, but just as the Pope had said, he had always put the overarching situation above all else.

As the capital experienced its first snow, the Li Palace assisted Wang Po and Chen Changsheng in resolving many problems, allowing the main streets to remain deserted and spacious for a very long time. However, not a single important figure of the Orthodoxy would directly assist them.

If that were to occur, the Orthodoxy and Imperial Court would truly drop all pretense, and just as Madam Mu was concerned about, affect the future northern expedition against the demons.

Madam Mu was not very content with the situation before her. She did not want Wang Po and Chen Changsheng to succeed through their insane ways, but she also did not want them to die.

The Imperial Court had long since made its preparations. There were certainly countless experts concealed in the alley of the Northern Military Department. Crucially, Tie Shu would assuredly

appear.

From every angle, Wang Po's and Chen Changsheng's deaths seemed assured.

Many people thought this way.

Thus, when they saw those figures proceeding forward through the drifting snow and deserted street, they seemed to carry an aura of tragedy.

The wind bleakly howled over the chilly Luo River.

Yet Wang Po and Chen Changsheng did not feel this way.

As they walked along the Luo River, they spoke of old matters from ancient books, like Wang Zhice's feats from the past, and also of the recent changes in the past few years, like the several times boats had crashed into the Bridge of Helplessness in the past year.

As they walked and chatted, they did not seek plum blossoms amongst the snow, did not look about with arrogance. They only raised and dropped their feet, naturally adjusting themselves and gradually melding with the heavens and earth.

Then, they reached the alley of the Northern Military Department.

They did not meet a tide of cavalry, were not welcomed by a violent rain of crossbow bolts.

On the quiet and spacious street, covered in snow, they saw only one person.

This person was covered in a cold aura, with a sharpness concealed beneath his clothes. He was not in the same world as the snow, but seemed to have transcended it.

This was an expert of the Divine Domain.

"Tie Shu. Possesses an extremely profound cultivation. He does not rely on wondrous abilities to win, only on strength. In terms of fighting power, he is ranked in the top three of the Storms of the Eight Directions."

Wang Po said to Chen Changsheng.

Back in Xunyang City, when he and Chen Changsheng joined hands to fight against Zhu Luo, there had not been a chance of victory, not even the smallest.

Today, Tie Shu had appeared on the snowy street, and his strength was on par with Zhu Luo's, but he was younger, his Qi, blood, and will all at their peak.

Just as Wang Po had said, purely in terms of fighting power, Tie Shu, together with Bie Yanghong and another old monster, was

the strongest.

Even if the Elder of Heavenly Secrets were to return to life, he might not be stronger than Tie Shu in this aspect.

Today, the opponent they needed to face was this sort of person.

Tie Shu was not standing on the street, but sitting on a table at the side of the street.

There were several chairs by this table.

"Let's part ways here."

"Okay."

"I'm going to go sit."

"Okay."

This simple conversation concluded.

Chen Changsheng and Wang Po parted on the street.

Wang Po walked towards the side of the street.

Chen Changsheng walked towards the courtyard at the end of the street.

Wang Po wanted to sit by the table.

He sat so that he could meet.

He wanted to meet with Tie Shu.

Although he was at the top of the Proclamation of Liberation, the unquestionable number one expert of the younger generation, he was still very lacking when compared to this legendary expert.

However, no one dared to say that his loss was assured.

Because he was Wang Po.

His family had been bankrupted and its people killed. He drifted about until he came to Wenshui, and then journeyed to the south. He had spent his entire life resisting the powerful forces of fate.

Whether it was the Great Zhou Imperial Court or an expert like Zhu Luo.

Till today, he still had not truly won a single battle, but neither had he lost.

Wang Po of Tianliang was most skilled at fighting as the weak against the strong.

The courtyard at the end of the street had once bloomed with crabapple blossoms, but all that fell today was snow.

Chen Changsheng walked towards that courtyard, his expression serene, his footsteps steady, his breathing and mind both at ease.

He knew that many assassins, killers, and experts were hidden within that courtyard, along with Lord Zhou Tong, who was at the upper level of Star Condensation.

But he was without fear, because he had come here before.

Although he had been unable to kill Zhou Tong at that time, he would definitely do it today.

He was confident that he would be able to take Zhou Tong's head from an army of ten thousand.

Because the Dao he cultivated and the sword he learned had always been meant to contend against thousands.

But besides that time where he killed people in that tea house on the journey back south, he had never had a chance to show this to the world.

The Orthodoxy's Chen Changsheng was most skilled at fighting as one against many.